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November
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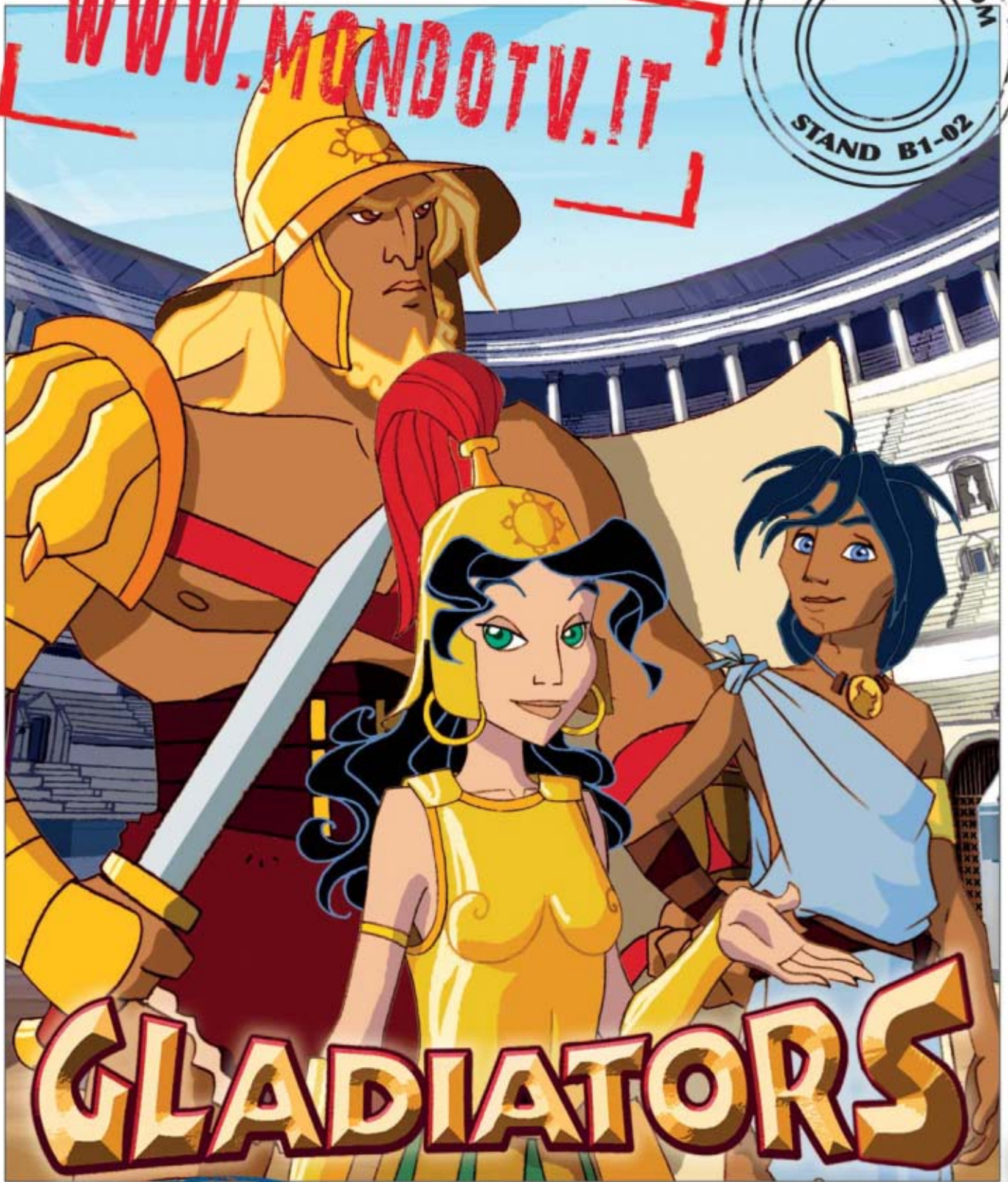
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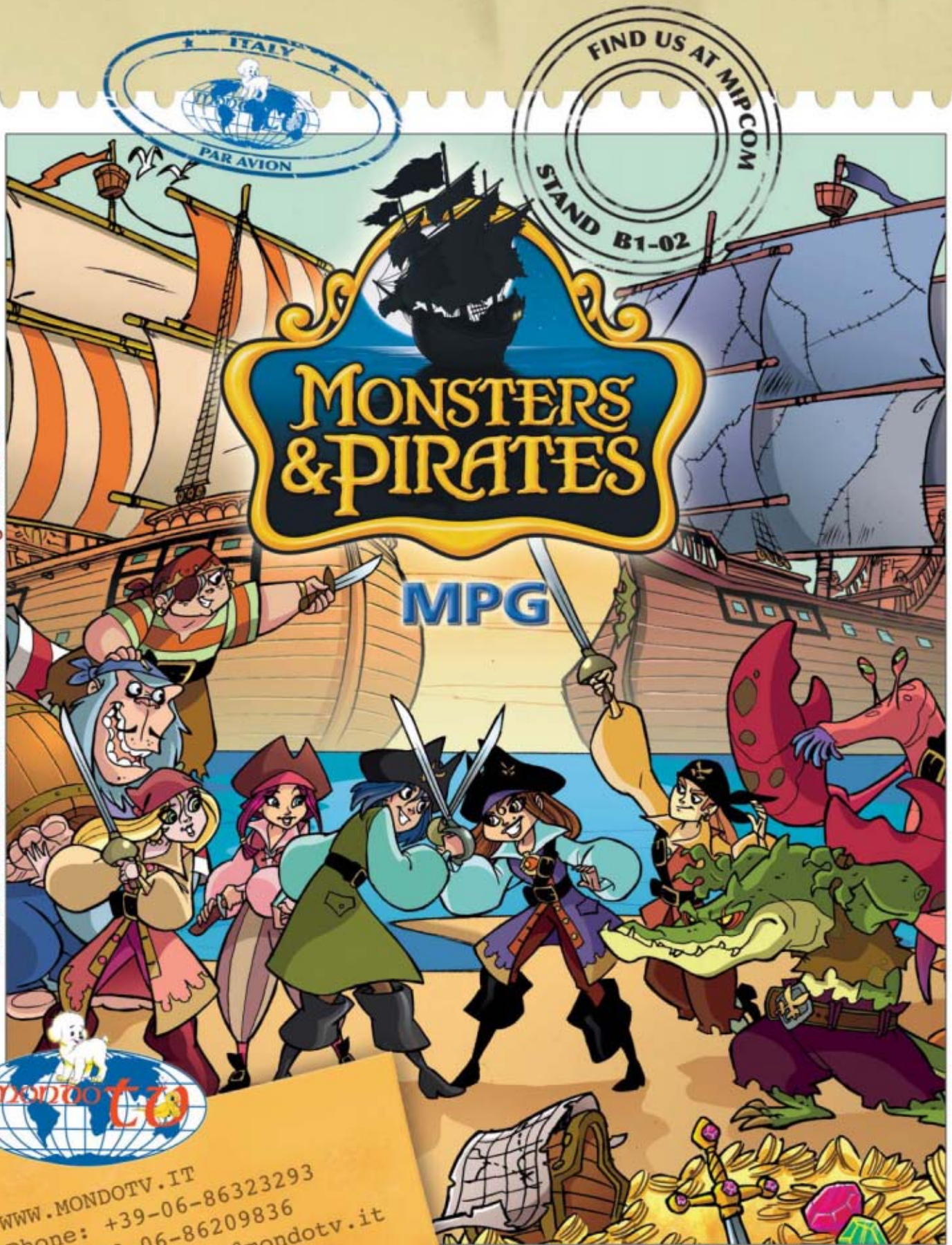
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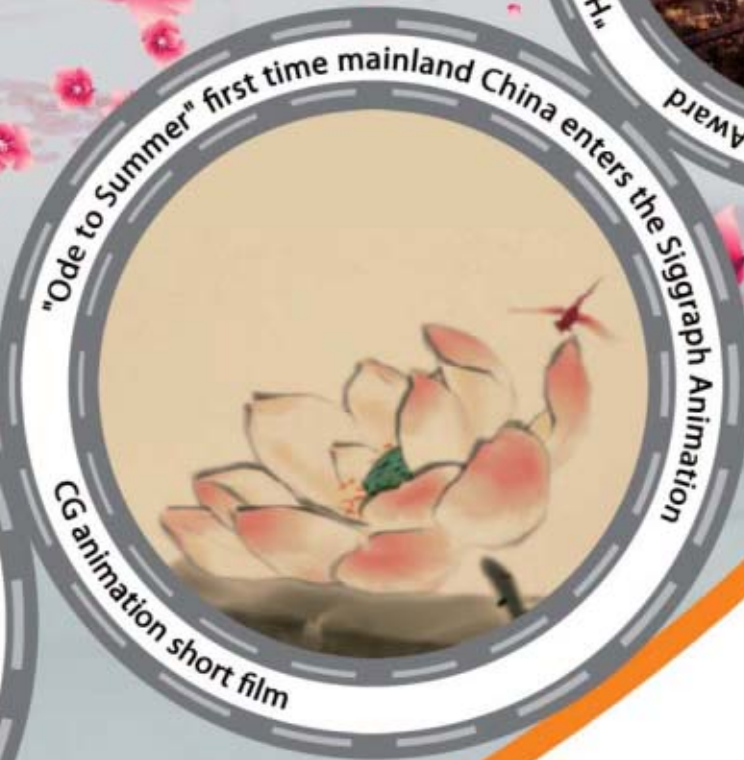
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Cover: DreamWorks Animation's *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* offers more eye-popping visuals and dramatic situations—and lemurs and penguins to boot.

MIPCOM Cover: Taffy Entertainment brings the new animated series *Twisted Whiskers* to the French TV market.



I am writing this month's letter from the beautiful Canadian city of Ottawa, where I had the great opportunity to attend the exciting Animation Festival and TV Conference. Never underestimate the ability of these and other toon-themed events to recharge your batteries and fuel your enthusiasm for the limitless possibilities of our favorite art form and medium.

First up, a big brava/shout-out to conference director Azarin Sohrabkhani, who put together a two-day program packed with informative seminars, panels and presentations. Having Nickelodeon Animation president Brown Johnson and *Robot Chicken* co-creators Seth Green and Matthew Senreich as keynote speakers was a huge coup. I still can't believe they managed to deliver inspiring speeches at 8:30 in the morning each day!

Johnson kicked things off by talking about Nickelodeon's early days and how the toon renaissance of the '90s began with three smart shows—*Doug*, *Rugrats* and *Ren & Stimpy*!—which all debuted on the same day in August of 1991. She also reminisced about one of her favorite meetings in which Stephen Hillenburg (wearing a Hawaiian shirt) showed up with an aquarium tank, played ukelele and pitched this show about a porous sponge.

"The consumer division wasn't as thrilled about the concept of the show, but they've come around since then," she joked. She also touched upon the great responsibility to fuel the animation process and to give freedom to artistic minds to roam. "You need to feel creative to be creative," she noted.

Green and Senreich were equally appreciative of the support they get from the team at Cartoon Network's [adult swim]. "We decided from day one never to work with people we don't like," said Green. He and Senreich talked about their amazement at the fact that they're in the fourth season of their hit stop-motion show. "It feels amazingly impossible. This was going to be our second job, our hobby, something that would never bring us money," added Green. "Each season takes about six months of pure intensive labor, but we're able to do this because we work with people who trust us to take chances and who share our goals to accomplish things."

They gave props to their staff of 102 employees (including the "unpaid interns!") and their team of "unspoiled and unbitter writers"). "We got David Hasselhoff to sing in a sketch called *Beastmaster: The Musical*. We got Burt Reynolds and Dom DeLuise ... Scarlett Johansson and Hulk Hogan ... We got Charlize Theron to guest on the show—and we paid her scale!!! We get to play with toys all day and get paid for it! How great is that?"

Pretty darn great, guys! Here's to many more seasons of the insanely funny show. Oh, and incidentally, the Season 3 DVD comes out on October 7!



Robot Chicken



Seth Green



Brown Johnson

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor-in-Chief
rzahed@animationmagazine.net

Quote of the Month

"\$9.99: The title also happens to be the price of a book that promises to reveal the meaning of life, an answer of interest to a mild-mannered 20-something guy who lives at home with his blustery father. Both of whom are stop-motion animated creations, part of a vivid universe of characters in search of contentment. Using the droll, wise stories of Etgar Keret as her guide, inventive Israeli filmmaker Tatia Rosenthal concocts an artful film that's enchanted, enchanting and meaningful, too."



—*Entertainment Weekly's* critic Lisa Schwarzbaum on Tatia Rosenthal's *\$9.99*, a hit at the recent Toronto Film Festival.

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Info@animationmagazine.net

President Jean Thoren

Publisher Jodi Bluth

Accounting Jan Bayouth

Webmaster Eric Brandenburg

EDITORIAL Edit@animationmagazine.net

Editor-in-Chief Ramin Zahed

Web and Gaming Editor Ryan Ball

Contributing Editors Chris Grove, Ron Magid,

Barbara Robertson

Editorial Assistant Mercedes Milligan

Animation Art Advisor Ron Barbagallo

Digital Reviews Editor Todd Sheridan Perry

Contributors

Alex S. Dai, Mike Fisher, Jake Friedman,

Kevin Geiger, Jill Gilbert, Kevin Kiner,

Robby London, Charles Solomon, Ellen Wolff

ADVERTISING SALES

Sales@animationmagazine.net

Sheri Shelton

PRODUCTION Prod@animationmagazine.net

Art and Production Director Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION Circ@animationmagazine.net

Circulation Director Jan Bayouth

Circulation Administrator Alexis Beebe

TO ADVERTISE:

Phone: 818-991-2884

Fax: 818-991-3773

Email: Sales@animationmagazine.net

Website: www.animationmagazine.net

List Rental

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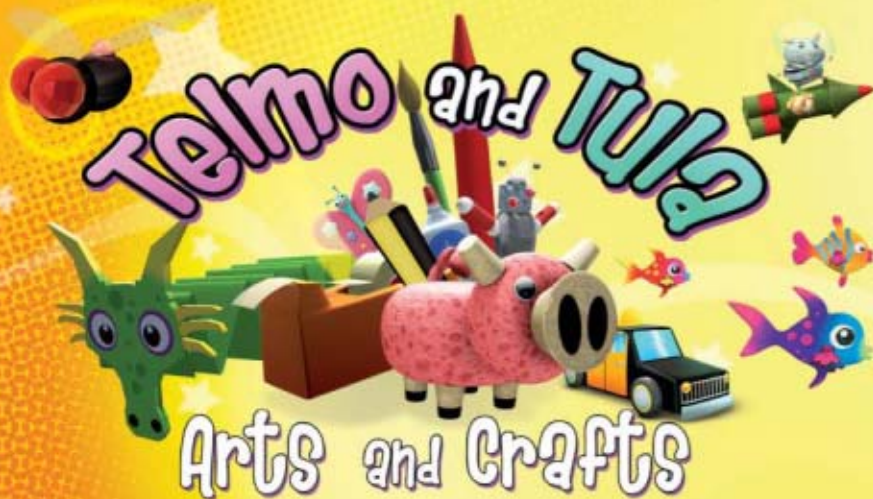
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The Animation Planner

November

1 Hailed as the Sundance of the game animation set, the annual **Machinima Filmfestival** takes place in New York City today (www.festival.machinima.org).



4 It's going to be a rough month on your wallet—just check out the titles out on DVD today: *Popeye the Sailor: 1941-1943, Vol. 3; Batman: The Complete Animated Series; Futurama: Bender's Game; Chowder, Vol. 1; Home Movies: 10th Anniversary Set* and *Fraggle Rock: The Complete Series!*



4-9 Brush up your German for the **Int'l Short Film Festival** in Berlin this week (www.interfilm.de).

6-14 Rio is perhaps the perfect city to host the **International Festival of Erotic Animation** (www.fiae.com.br).



7 The folks at DreamWorks Animation are hoping for another big holiday hit with *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*, in which Alex the Lion (Ben Stiller) and friends find themselves missing the comforts of their New York City zoo again.



10-16 Learn to do it in Portuguese at the **Cinanima Festival** in Espinho, Portugal, this week (www.cinanima.pt).



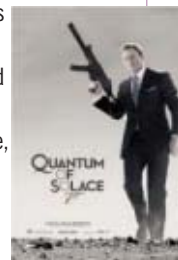
11 If you'd like to get some early holiday shopping done, just check out the new DVDs on sale today: *Walt Disney Treasures: The Chronological Donald, Vol. 4, 1951-1961* and *Mickey Mouse Club Presents Annette 1957-1958; Naruto the Movie: Guardians of the Crescent Moon Kingdom; Harry Potter, Years 1-5* and *Firefly: The Complete Series* on Blu-ray.



11-13 Hey, mates, it's time to fly to Sydney for the **Australian Effects and Animation Awards** (www.digitalmedia.com.au).



14 Daniel Craig is back to do his thing as Agent 007 in the oddly titled *Quantum of Solace* feature, directed by Marc Forster.



14-16 Yes, more excitement is brewing Down Under, as the **AnimfxNZ** kicks off in Wellington, New Zealand today (www.animfxnz.com).



18 We have a big smile on our face as Disney/Pixar's *WALL•E* comes out on DVD and Blu-ray today. Also demanding our attention are the new *SpongeBob SquarePants: Season 5, Vol. 2* and *Doctor Who: The Infinite Quest*.



18-20 Check out visions for our future at the **6Sight Future of Imaging** confab in Monterey, Calif. (www.futureimage.com).



19-23 Take in the views at the **3DX Film and Entertainment Tech Festival** in Singapore. Special guests include James Cameron, Jeffrey Katzenberg and Jim Gianopulos (www.3dxfestival.com).



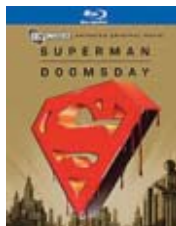
21-23 You can meet Brian O'Halloran (*Clerks*) and the cast and crew of *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* at this year's **Atlanta SuperCon** (www.atlantasupercon.com).



21 Disney will unleash its much-anticipate new animated feature, *Bolt*, in theaters today. Directed by Byron Howard and Chris Miller, the pic features the voices of John Travolta and Susie Essman. Teenage girls will be rushing to see the screen adaptation of Stephenie Meyer's bloodsuckers' tale *Twilight*.



25 It's a bird. It's a plane. It's the *Superman: Doomsday* movie, which arrives on shiny Blu-ray today.



26 If you're in the mood for holiday post-apocalyptic tales of doom, you may want to check out Viggo Mortensen and Charlize Theron in *The Road*. Fans of more escapist fare may opt for the latest offering from lean, mean fighting machine Jason Statham in *Transporter 3*.



27 Today is the opening day of the **Anilogue Int'l Animation Festival**, which runs through Dec. 3 in Budapest, Hungary (www.anilogue.com).



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail mercedes@animationmagazine.net.

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Books We Love

100 Days of Monsters

By Stefan G. Bucher

[How Books, \$19.99]

It all started in May of 2006, when designer Stefan Bucher decided to draw an ink-blot monster every day for 100 days and post a video of himself drawing the creature online. That's how the popular site dailymonster.com was born, and soon millions of fans were submitting their own back stories about the sketches and as of a few months ago, over 1,600,000 videos had been downloaded. Those of us who'd like to have a record of this creative endeavor in our hands are doing a happy dance about the *Monsters* book and tie-in DVD. "I wanted to create a time capsule of this odd little lark that developed a life of its own," writes Bucher in the intro. "I didn't plan any of this, but I'm so glad it happened. I've been drawing since I could hold a pencil, and I've always been happy when I got another drawing done. But after all these years, these monsters are the first drawings that are fun while I'm drawing them!" And believe us when we tell you that this book is definitely just as fun to look at or give to someone who appreciates much-needed splashes of creativity in this world.



The Art of Bolt

By Mark Cotta Vaz

[Chronicle Books, \$40]

Although Disney's *Bolt* will be under much scrutiny since it's the first non-Pixar CG-animated project from the studio under John Lasseter's leadership, family audiences will simply go to the theaters to take in an entertaining story about a white German Shepherd star who has to adjust to life in the real world, accompanied by a nervous cat named Mittens and a hamster called Rhino. The project has had a troubled history—fans were dismayed when the toon's original director Chris Sanders (*Lilo & Stitch*) left Disney after clashing with Lasseter and Ed



Catmull, but when an extended clip was screened at Comic-Con last July, fans gave it two paws up. In late October, the companion art book penned by the knowledgeable Mark Cotta Vaz arrives in stores, a few weeks before the movie's opening. Cotta Vaz has taken us on similar rides before—his credits include books about the art of *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Star Wars* and *The Polar Express*—and definitely knows his subject matter. As we've come to expect from Chronicle Books, there is no shortage of concept art, storyboard sketches and full-color illustrations—over 250 pieces are included in this glossy hardcover. The movie's talented helmers Chris Williams and Byron Howard provide the book's intro, and there's a foreword by everyone's favorite chief creative officer, John Lasseter. Now all moviegoers will need are an open mind and the power to stop comparing every animated movie to *WALL•E*!

Walt Disney's Alice in Wonderland

Illustrated by Mary Blair, written by Jon Scieszka

[Disney Press, \$16.99]

The past couple years certainly had their share of horrible low points in art and culture, but any period that sees the release of not one, but two books illustrated by the amazing Mary Blair can't be all that bad. It's a delight to see Jon Scieszka's (*The Stinky Cheese Man*, *Time Warp Trio*) clever retelling of the Lewis Carroll story accompanied by the drawings of Blair (1911-1978), who is credited with color stylings on Disney's *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* and continues to influence new generations of animators and illustrators. There's only one problem about revisiting *Wonderland* through the eyes of the uniquely talented Ms. Blair—you wish more volumes of her artwork could become available to us every year. If the 64 pages of this book leave you hungry for more, don't forget to check out John Canemaker's definitive book about the artist, *The Art and Flair of Mary Blair* (Disney Editions, \$40), which was published in 2003. ■



—Ramin Zahed



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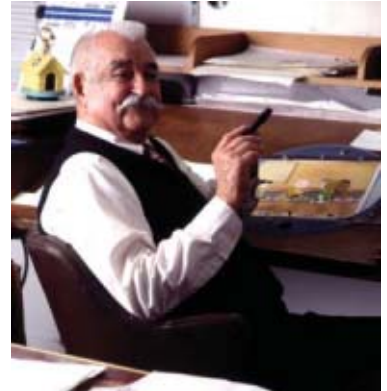
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In Memoriam: Bill Melendez (1917-2008)

It's the end of an era, Charlie Brown. Last month, the animation world mourned the loss of Bill Melendez, the talented animator, director and producer who gave us those unforgettable *Peanuts* TV specials. Melendez, who had a remarkable 70-year career as an animator and worked on Disney classics such as *Dumbo*, *Bambi*, *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia* and *Bambi* and Warner Bros. characters such as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Porky Pig, died at the age of 91 at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, Calif.

Born in Sonora, Mexico, Melendez and his family moved to Arizona in 1928 and then to Los Angeles in the 1930s. Melendez trained at the Chouinard Art Studio (now CalArts) and was a former faculty member of the Cinema Arts Dept. at USC. Melendez left Warner Bros. for UPA in 1948, where as a director and producer he worked on hundreds of commercials and shorts, including the Oscar-winning *Gerald McBoing Boing*.

In 1959, he directed the first animated version of Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* characters for a series of Ford Falcon commercials. In 1964, he founded Bill Melendez



Productions, where he delivered his best-loved project, the Emmy-winning holiday classic *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965), co-produced with partner Lee Mendelson for CBS. In addition to the *Peanuts* collection (which included over 63 half-hour specials, five one-hour specials, four features and over 372 commercials), Melendez also directed *Garfield on the Town*, *Cathy*, *Babar Comes to America* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He was also the voice of Snoopy, Woodstock and Spike throughout the years.

Melendez received 17 Emmy nomination and eight wins, as well as an Oscar nomination for co-writing the score for *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* with Vince Guaraldi and two Peabody awards. His son Steven will continue his legacy and lead Bill Melendez Productions. Melendez is survived by his wife of 68 years, Helen; two sons; six grandchildren; and 11 great grandchildren. Donations may be made in his name to the Children's Hospital, Los Angeles.

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Nick Greenlights *Fanboy*

It's official: After a successful sneak peek at Comic-Con this year, Eric Robles' original ***Fanboy and Chum Chum*** series has been picked up by Nickelodeon for an early 2009 debut.

The show, which began its life as one of Fred Seibert's *Random! Cartoons* shorts, follows the misadventures of Fanboy, a 10-year-old comic-book enthusiast (David Hornsby) and his imaginative sidekick Chum Chum (Nika Futterman). The cabler has ordered 26

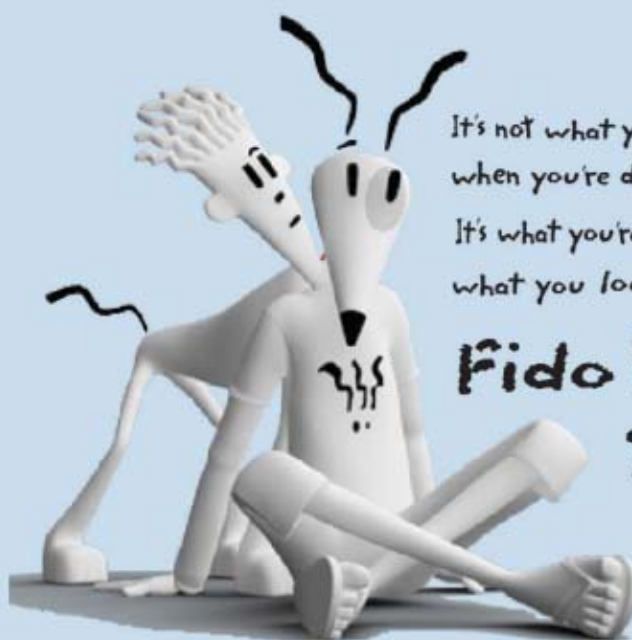


episodes of the CG-animated show, which is executive produced by Robles, Seibert and Steve Tompkins. The series voice cast also includes Jamie Kennedy, Josh Duhamel and Estelle Harris. We're sure many of us will recognize some part of ourselves reflected in the new show's main characters!

Revisiting Astro Boy's Father

If you are lucky enough to be in Japan this month for the Tokyo Film Festival, make sure you take in a wonderful retrospective planned for the "father of manga

and anime," the late **Osamu Tezuka**. After creating some of the most successful Japanese comic books of the post-war era, he transferred his talents to the world of TV animation. In 1963, *Astro Boy* became the first domestic animated TV series in Japan, and it was followed by many other hits including *Kimba the White Lion*. The festival celebration includes the 1979 anime, *Marine Express*, which has an environmental theme, as well as selected episodes of *Astro Boy*, *Princess Knight* and *New Jungle Emperor, Go Ahead Leo!*. On the feature side, audiences will get a chance to see *The Fantastic Adventures of Unico* (1981) and *Unico in the Island of Magic* (1983), and the live-action/animated projects *Phoenix: Dawn* (1978) and *Phoenix 2772* (1980). Let's hope this event becomes a traveling show so that we all get to experience some of Tezuka's rarely seen classics on the big screen. ■



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More E for All

Game on for second annual interactive entertainment expo. **by Ryan Ball**

When it was announced that the 2007 Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) would be closed to the public, it looked like Game Over for enthusiasts who had come out every year to check out all the hottest upcoming games, get some hands-on time with new consoles and meet fellow gamers from around the world (and blow them up). The discontent was short-lived, however, as the Entertainment for All Expo (E for All) emerged to fill the void, giving button mashers an occasion to once again gather in Los Angeles and revel in gamer geekdom. The second annual edition takes place Oct. 3-5 at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

Produced by IDG World Expo, E For All is a celebration of video games and the people who play them. Bringing together consumers, members of the media, publishers, developers and retailers, the event features exhibits from leading interactive entertainment companies and allows consumers to test and buy the newest video games and gadgets. Other highlights include professional game tournaments, educational seminars and celebrity appearances.

One of this year's biggest developments is the participation of Microsoft Corp., which sat out last year's show. The company behind the Xbox 360 and many of today's bestselling games will be bringing its latest wares in hopes of winning the approval of the international gaming community.

Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel is back as the face of the second edition of E for All. Holder of 12 world championship titles in five different games, Wendel is living every hard-core gamer's fantasy of playing games and



making big bucks doing it. He'll be on the show floor interacting with his fans, challenging fellow gamers in head-to-head exhibitions, conducting hands-on gaming demonstrations, signing autographs and sharing his vision for the future of pro gaming.

Mary Dolaher, CEO of IDG World Expo, tells us feedback from last year's event has helped greatly in making the show even better this time around. "Perhaps one of the biggest things that we received feedback on

was the desire to see more of the best game companies and best titles represented at the show," she says. "That's one of the reasons that we're thrilled to have Microsoft on-board at this year's E for All. We also heard last year that attendees wanted more flexibility and savings in ticket prices, so we've changed our pricing structure to meet those needs."

Dolaher and her team are also excited about a new partnership with Target, which will be the official retailer at E for All. The arrangement will allow expo attendees to not only try the newest games and gear, but also purchase them on the spot and take them home.

Another major attraction at this year's show is the World Cyber Games USA 2008 National Final. Two-hundred of America's best players will be competing for a chance to make Team USA and represent the U.S. at the WCG 2008 Grand Final in November. The competition will also include the Samsung Mobile Challenge tournament, a women's gaming invitational tournament, an old-school pinball competition, various walk-up video gaming contests and more.

Those interested in careers in making games can attend the Game Developers Conference (GDC) Game Career Seminar. "The seminar helps jumpstart the careers of passionate gamers who want to work in the video game development industry," notes Dolaher. It's an important program that helps newcomers and industry insiders alike uncover opportunities, inspire new ideas and further their careers."

According to Dolaher, the exploding casual gaming sector will also be heavily represented in this year's expo. "Our show floor will reflect this broadening of the industry's audience, featuring a diverse group of companies offering everything from games for children to games for the most devoted gamer," she says. "Additionally, we are in the process of solidifying some new programs on the show floor that will cater to new and casual gamers, which will be made public shortly." Companies presenting games will be vying for the E For All People's Choice awards, which are reserved for the games that fare the best in public voting. Results will be released after the show and will help in identifying which titles will be the hottest sellers this holiday season. ■

For more information on E For All 2008 go to www.EforAllExpo.com.

Gaming Evolves with *Spore*

Gamers get creative with the hot new game from EA and Sims creator Will Wright. by Ryan Ball

As the ongoing debate over creationism and evolution becomes a hot-button issue in the current U.S. presidential debate, a new online sensation from Electronic Arts and the creator of the Sims franchise shows that the two disciplines don't have to be mutually exclusive. *Spore* is a "massively single-player" game that allows gamers to create a new species of creature and steer its evolution to ensure survival in an ever-changing virtual universe. Will the title help Bible literalists and followers of Darwin finally find some middle ground? It's doubtful. But it is a great way to exercise creativity and kill some time online.

Developed by Will Wright's Maxis studio, *Spore* features the unique Creature Creator, which allows players to model their own 3D creatures using provided body parts and easy-to-use editing tools. Life forms can be as simple or as complex as the user wants to make them, and gamers are proving that the sky is the limit. The game debuted just weeks ago, but the Creature Creator was released months earlier, allowing people around the world to play with the tools and upload their creations. By the second day of availability, roughly 250,000 unique creatures had been generated. More than three million had been created by the time the game shipped. Each new species designed becomes part of the game and contributes to the growth of the *Spore* world.

"There are lots of games that let you make your own character, since *Dungeons & Dragons* came out back in the '70s, in fact," notes Chris Hecker, technology fellow at Maxis. "Most games don't take it as far as we have, though. *Spore* lets players stick an arbitrary number of arms and legs and heads on their character, which takes it to a whole new level in terms of the game needing to deal with the combinatorics."

Combinatorics is a fancy way of saying there are some crazy-ass looking creatures and the animation system has to drive each unique variation. It seems impossible, but

leave it to the folks at Maxis to figure it out. The company has written a couple detailed technical papers on the subject and recently presented its animation system at SIGGRAPH.

"The animator describes what they're trying to accomplish with a given motion to the system, in a way that the system can apply to

were a kid, but the Creature Creator gave them a way to express themselves and be creative, which is a wonderful thing."

Spore builds on principles introduced in previous Maxis games, but also represents a leap into all-new territory. Hecker explains, "We tried to keep a lot of the same qualities that made people like *The Sims*, like having non-combat ways of resolving conflict and not having the experience be so directed that the player can't make up their own stories. That said, it's clearly a lot of different technology from a *Sims* or *SimCity* game, that's for sure."

In addition to making creatures, players can use editing tools to revise the design of buildings and vehicles found in the universe.



the creature later," Hecker explains. "So the animator tells the system, 'I want to select a right-hand side grasper and move it to pick a piece of fruit,' and the system takes that description and figures out how to apply it to the player's creature [taking into account] how big the motion should be, where the fruit is on the tree, etc."

The Creature Creator was five years in development as Maxis worked to find a way to put professional-quality character modeling capabilities in the hands of untrained artists.

"The biggest thing for me is that it's really helped people unleash their creative side," Hecker notes. "You can find a lot of forum posts on the Internet where people talk about how they hadn't drawn anything since they

Hecker thinks the creativity involved will help Maxis capture an even bigger chunk of the exploding casual games market.

"The lesson of Web 2.0 firms like YouTube and MySpace is that everybody likes to create things and put them up for others to see, so hopefully we will tap into that," he says. "Since we now have 11 million creations in the database, I think we're well on our way. Figuring out how to use all this amazing data is a really fun challenge!"

Spore is now available for Windows PC and Nintendo DS. *Spore Origins* is also on the market for mobile devices. The Creature Creator is a separate application that retails for \$9.99. For more information, go to www.spore.com. ■

The Return Call of the Wild



The creative team behind the Madagascar sequel faced many visual and narrative challenges as the film brings the Central Park zoo animals to the plains of Africa. (Yes, the crafty penguins and the party-loving lemurs are also back for the ride.) **by Ramin Zahed**

How do you follow up a ram-bunctious movie about a group of New York City animals who have to fend for themselves in the jungles of Madagascar? You do what they used to with the old Bob Hope and Bing Crosby movies: Take the likeable characters and put them in new surroundings, where they'll be bombarded with more challenging and hilarious situations.

Directed by Eric Darnell (*Antz*, *Madagascar*) and Tom McGrath (*Madagascar*), the sequel to the 2005 summer blockbuster, which made close to \$533 million worldwide, has certainly upped the ante, both in terms of its inspired CG-animated visuals and its emotionally rewarding storyline. *Madagascar: Escape 2*

Africa finds Alex the lion (Ben Stiller), Marty the zebra (Chris Rock), Melman the giraffe (David Schwimmer) and Gloria the hippo (Jada Pinkett Smith) lost in the awe-inspiring plains of Africa after a disastrous flight aboard an old crashed plane fixed by the penguins!

"We kind of had a story in mind before the first movie came out," says Tom McGrath, who also voices Skipper, the penguin. "We had it in the back of our minds that they'd go to mainland Africa. They are such fun characters that we knew we could take them to different places and through deeper emotional experiences."

After they got the go-ahead from DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey

Katzenberg, McGrath and Darnell (who co-wrote and directed the first outing) and co-writer Etan Cohen (*King of the Hill*, *Tropic Thunder*) decided to explore how Alex was taken from the Savannah by poachers as a young cub and depict his reunion with the parents he never got to know.

"Part of the emotional impact of the movie comes from Alex's relationship with his dad [voiced by the late Bernie Mac], who is an alpha lion," says McGrath. "His father has a certain idea of what a male lion should be like, and Alex is a song-and-dance guy, and his dad doesn't really see his gifts. Then we also have the love story between Melman and Gloria, which was a residual from the first movie. We really feel that emotionally, this one is a lot stronger than the first movie."

Being There

Once the sequel's location was decided, Katzenberg took the directors and the



Director Eric Darnell



Director
Tom McGrath



Art Director
Shannon Jeffries



Production Designer
Kendal Cronkrite



Return of the Beasts 2.0: Led by directors Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath, *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* ups the ante with CG-animated set pieces involving various collections of animals and stunning African landscapes. The star-studded voice cast includes familiar voices from the first movie (Ben Stiller, Chris Rock, David Schwimmer, Jada Pinkett Smith, Sacha Baron Cohen and Andy Richter) as well as new additions such as Cedric the Entertainer, the late Bernie Mac and music by will.i.am.

heads of the film's department on a trip to the continent so they could all get a good feel for the unique landscape and flora and fauna. "We visited Kenya and seven different wildlife parks in eight days," says McGrath. "There have been so many movies made in Africa, but once you see it yourself, it's a completely different experience. For example, part of the plot revolves around the importance of the watering hole and how water is such a valuable resource for all the animals. That came out of our trip."

The new setting opened a world of possibilities to Darnell and McGrath, who met eight years ago at DreamWorks. "A lot of people weren't aware of Madagascar ... Some didn't even know what it looked like. So, we could create this fantasy world," says Darnell. "But Africa is so different ... Even if you haven't been there, you have an idea of

what it looks like. We took the design conceits that were a big part of the original movie and tried to create an Africa that they'd recognize."

McGrath says they used over 15,000 photos and numerous hours of video footage as blueprints for their CG adventure. "When you get to Africa, you realize just how big the place is," he says, "Two-thirds of what you see when you're there is sky. And we just realized that it has to be a huge part of our set ... How are we going

to do that?"

The film's accomplished vfx crew helped create the majestic skies, the millions of blades of grass and the difficult scenes featuring herds of animals using the studio's proprietary digital software. "We pushed the limits of technology, trying to get the light to shine through the clouds to get a unique translucent behavior," says returning vfx supervisor Philippe Gluckman, "This brought us some really amazing images that either were used di-

rectly, where the clouds are actually 3D elements, or were used as the basis for the painters to start with. And it gave us looks that were really fascinating." A team of matte painters then helped incorporate these expensive CG clouds into the frames.

One of the key scenes in the movie is the plane crash in the first act. Aided by Oscar-winning cinematographer Guillermo Navarro



(*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Stuart Little*), the filmmakers plotted the sequence by strapping animators and layout artists on an upside-down couch and shooting them with a shaky camera. The vfx team spent a lot of time creating subtle touches such as blowing curtains, wind blowing through the animals' manes, or pieces of the plane's body being peeled away as it crashes down to Earth. Each shot in the crash sequence involved 15 to 30 effects elements, and the artists would spend about six weeks polishing each one them. Because of the project's visual fireworks and mind-boggling attention to detail, the render time for *Escape 2 Africa* clocked in at 30 million hours—a huge bump over the 12 million hours it took to complete *Madagascar*.

Different Stripes

For production designer Kendal Cronkhite (*Antz*, *James and the Giant Peach*) who also worked on the first movie, the complex setting provided an opportunity to experiment more with the color palettes and the region's distinctive visual style. "We used a child's point of view as the basis for our saturated colors in the first movie," she notes. "I wanted to go for a more sophisticated look—you have a simplified landscape—and you put one tree out there and your eye immediately focus on that. The challenge was to keep the filmgoers eyes on the intimate emotions on the characters' faces and not have the scope of the film overwhelm those details."

Cronkhite picks out her favorite scene in the movie: "It's a monochromatic, dusty sequence in the Savannah," she responds. "There's a point where their home set changes overnight and it turns into a very different, dustier and dry place. It's a much scarier place than *Madagascar*. There's also a very cool volcano sacrifice sequence—which has this organic Guggenheim museum, retro feel to it."

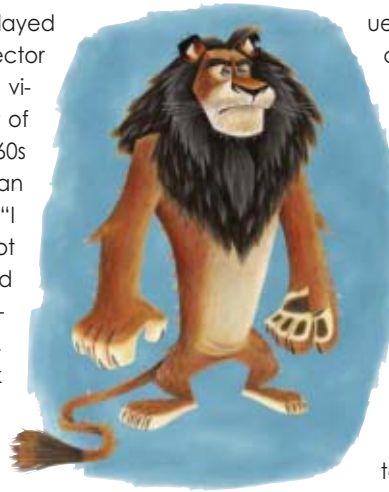
Cronkhite, who draws traditionally as well as working in Photoshop and Maya, says the process was hugely helped by having a pre-viz artist deliver some of the sets early in the process. "This is very helpful as you see how each world is connected to the other, and it also allows the filmmakers to understand the movements and the scene dynamics better," she believes



The retro look also played an integral part in art director Shannon Jeffries' overall vision. "We looked at a lot of design work from the '60s and also looked at African patterns," she says. "I came to realize that a lot of '60s design was based on African patterns, textures, masks and art. Some of the images look quite abstract."

Jeffries says it's incredible to see how much more sophisticated the CG animation has become in the three years since the first movie came out. "We were able to do so much more with the details," she adds. "We found ways of allowing each of the main characters to stand out in huge crowds of animals."

"Technology has changed so much in recent years," notes Darnell. "We have access to so much more processing power and the software contin-



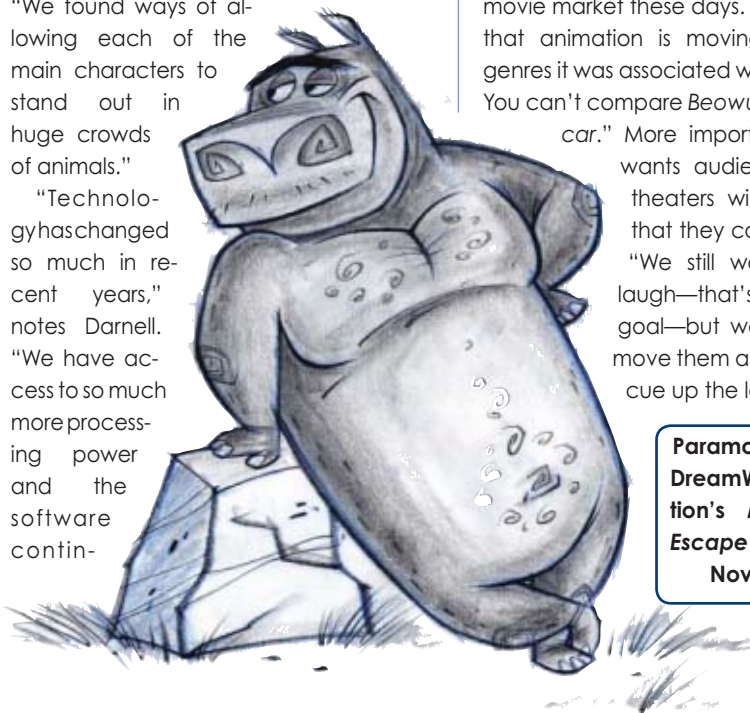
ues to improve and become more user-friendly. People are getting so much better in using the medium to tell their stories. Today, we're seeing more traditional animators who were reluctant to come to computer animation bringing their decades of experience to CG and using it in rewarding ways. The technology has also reached a point where, as

an animator, you can pretty much create whatever you dream up."

McGrath says he's pretty jazzed about the vital role animation is playing in the movie market these days. "We are seeing that animation is moving beyond the genres it was associated with traditionally. You can't compare *Beowulf* to *Madagascar*."

More important, he simply wants audiences to leave theaters with experiences that they can identify with. "We still want people to laugh—that's our main goal—but we also want to move them a little!" Now, just cue up the lemur song! ■

Paramount releases DreamWorks Animation's *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* on November 7.



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The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the Latest Anime Releases on DVD and Blu-ray

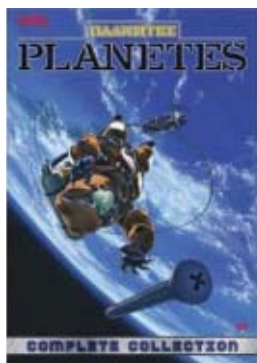
by Charles Solomon



Planetes: Complete Collection [Bandai: \$49.98, 6 discs]

Unlike most sci-fi shows, *Planetes* (2001-04) deals with a real scientific problem: space junk. There are about 15,000 objects four inches or larger orbiting the Earth at speeds approaching eight km per second, including bolts, tools and metal fragments. All this floating crud poses a hazard to navigation, and it's the job of the Debris Section on Space Station ISPV-7 to clean it up (echoes of *WALL•E*). While it's an important job, it's not a prestigious one, as perky but klutzy Ai Tanabe learns when she joins the crew in 2075. The Debris Section is staffed with under-appreciated and underpaid misfits. Ai immediately begins arguing with her instructor, veteran astronaut and junkman Hachirota "Hachimaki" Hoshino (his nickname comes from the *hachimaki* or inscribed headband he always wears).

The premise of an over-eager, inept newcomer joining a team of oddball grunts has been used many times in anime. But whenever *Planetes* seems about to fall into formula, director Gorô Taniguchi and his artists toss in an unexpected element. Although



he's a seasoned spacer with years of extra-vehicular missions under his belt, Hachimaki has to confront fears that threaten to end his career after a near-fatal accident. The squabbles between Ai and Hachimaki inevitably metamorphose into romance, but the filmmakers remain true to their offbeat characters and avoid a pat ending. The extras include discussions with NASA scientists about the problem of space debris—and photos of objects that have fallen to Earth.

Gurren Lagann 02 and 03 [Bandai: \$29.98, 2 discs each]



The freewheeling fantasy-adventure *Gurren Lagann* (known as *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann* in Japan, which translates as "Heaven Shattering Crimson Face") became the anime sleeper hit of 2008, but the producers faced the challenge of keeping the insanity rolling after the death of the hero (Kamina) at the end of Episode #8. Simon is crushed by the death of his friend and hero. The rest of the crew, especially his latent love interest, Nia, join to bring Simon out of his funk. Evoking Kamina's rallying cry, "Rejecting common sense to make the impossible possible is the Team Gurren Way," Simon leads the continuing battle against Spiral King Lord Genome. Once the humans discover that the Spiral capitol of Teppelin is actually a gigantic mecha, their victory is assured. But Lord Genome warns Simon that if the human population ever passes the one million mark, they will have to face an even greater threat.

Seven years later, Simon is the ruler of Teppelin, renamed Kamina City. But when the human population reaches 1,000,001, the threat Lord Genome prophesied arrives. The universe is divided between Spiral and Anti-Spiral forces—and the Anti-Spirals fear humanity's growing strength (the Gurren mecha's multiple drills reflect mankind's Spiral nature). After thwarting a plot to smash the Moon into the Earth, Simon leads his nutty friends across the dimensions to the Anti-Spirals' home.

Director Hiroyuki Imaishi and his animation team at Gainax pull out all the stops in a flashily edited whirligig of neon colors, bizarre mecha designs and snazzy effects. As he faces increasingly dire threats, Simon grows and matures until he resembles a slightly saner version of the outrageous Kamina. Ultimately, the story makes even less sense than *Martian Successor Nadesico*, *Dokkoida*?! and other self-reflexive

parodies. But *Gurren Lagann* is so much fun, it seems churlish to cavil about minor problems like a nonsensical plot. A *Gurren Lagann* feature will be released in Japan this fall.

Yu Yu Hakusho: Season One and Two Box Sets [FUNimation: \$34.98, 4 discs each]

Yusuke Urameshi, who looks like Johnny Depp in the 1990 John Waters movie *Cry-Baby*, takes pride in just one thing: being the toughest kid in Sarayashiki Junior High. The hero of *Yu Yu Hakusho* lives to pound people into *mochi*, especially his archrival Kuwabara. Acting on a rare, kindly impulse, Yusuke gets killed saving a younger boy from being hit by a car. Koenma, the son of the ruler of the Spirit World, decides to give him a second chance. As a "spirit detective," he'll track down evil beings in the human world. Enough good actions will cause a "spirit egg" to hatch into a generous beast that will get his body back; if Yusuke behaves badly, he'll create a soul-devouring monster.

The transition from two-bit punk to Good Guy doesn't always go smoothly, but Yusuke manages to make allies of Kuwabara and two powerful demons, Kurama and Hiei. Using a combination of guts, luck and kindness, he frees a Snow Maiden imprisoned by sinister capitalists and outfights the four "Saint Beasts," demons associated with the Chinese directional animals. The second season focuses on the Dark Tournament, a sort of supernatural Ultimate Fighting match. Yusuke's curmudgeonly sensei Genkai teaches him her ultimate technique, the "Spirit Wave Ball." It requires greater levels of power and control than Yusuke commands, and mastering it causes him to suffer horribly. The fate of Team Urameshi in the Dark Tournament is never really in question, but like *Dragon Ball Z*, *Yu Yu Hakusho* provides lots of male bonding, martial arts training, slapstick comedy and over-the-top fights against bizarre opponents. ■



Late-in-the-Year Liaisons on DVD

Homer, Princess Aurora, Robot Chicken and a clan of feisty rabbits flirt with your wallet this month. *by Mercedes Milligan*

The Simpsons—The Complete Eleventh Season [Fox, \$49.98]

One of the most highly scrutinized seasons of *The Simpsons*, Season 11 rolled out of the pipeline the same year *Futurama* launched—taking boffo crew Matt Groening, David X. Cohen, Josh Weinstein and Bill Oakley with it. Fans wondered if new head Mike Scully could keep the show as fresh and funny as ever after 10 years on the air, and there was much Comic Book Guy-esque wrinking of noses. But Scully exceeded expectations, bringing us now-classic episodes like *Beyond Blunderdome* (guest starring Mel Gibson), *E-I-E-I-D'oh!* (can you say "Tomacco?") and the series shifting *Alone Again, Natura-Diddily*, which killed off Maude Flanders in a tragic NASCAR mishap.

This four-disc set packs all 22 episodes from the Season into a limited edition "Krusty Head" box, and is loaded with special features: Intro from creator Matt Groening, episode commentary, deleted scenes, animatics, boards/sketches and *The Many Faces of Krusty* and *A Star in Hollywood Boulevard* featurettes. A worthy release, no matter what your Simpsons Elitist friends say.

[Release date: Oct. 7]

Sleeping Beauty Two Disc Platinum Edition [Disney, \$29.99]

Disney continues its Platinum Edition roll out with this gorgeous 1959 feature, based on the fairytale by Charles Perrault. Directed by a team of toon legends—Clyde Geronimi, Les Clark, Eric Larson and Wolfgang Reitherman—and featuring elaborate backgrounds and lush design by Winsor McCay Award-winner Eyvind Earle (*Peter Pan*), *Sleeping Beauty* was the last Disney film to use hand-inked cels. One of the studio's most lavish animated features, the



beauty and quality of this mid-century masterpiece make it a true toon classic. Inspired by Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty Ballet*, the film's score by George Bruns (performed by the Berlin Symphony Orchestra) received an Oscar nomination.

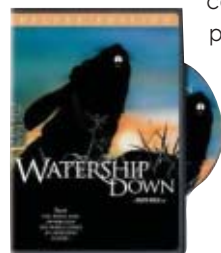
The set features the restored and enhanced film, plus a virtual tour of Aurora's castle, interactive dance game, making-of featurette and plenty more. The Mouse will also release this Edition as a Blu-ray set, which comes with a bonus DVD of the film, so you can enjoy Princess Aurora's adventures at home on your PS3 or tucked in to the kids' portable DVD player (\$34.99).

[Release date: Oct. 7]

Watership Down—Deluxe Edition [Warner, \$19.98]

Growing up as a tomboy, I was less than enthused the day my aunt handed me Richard Adams' *Watership Down*—about a million pages long, covered by a pastoral illustration of bunnies... Despite her prompting ("It's not really about rabbits") I didn't crack *Watership* open for years, but I've since read it again. And again. And it warms my heart to see this beautiful animated adaptation released in its re-mastered glory to bring Adams' dark, imaginative, inspiring story to another generation.

Written, directed and produced by Martin Rosen—who went on to helm the TV series (1999) and another animated Adams story, *The Plague Dogs* (1982)—*Watership* became the sixth most popular film of 1979 in the U.K., and was recently named one of the Top 100 Greatest Cartoons by Channel 4. John Hubley was the proj-



ect's first director until his death in 1977, and his (and Faith's) work remains—notably in the "fable" scene. The film is augmented by the talented voicework of John Hurt, Richard Briers, Nigel Hawthorne and Joss Ackland as the ominous Black Rabbit. A worthy addition to any DVD library; Frith be praised.

[Release date: Oct. 7]

Robot Chicken: Season Three [Turner, \$29.98]

The latest season of Seth Green's stop-mo farce fest has hit DVD shelves, much to the delight of crass pop-culture humorists everywhere. Desecrating everything from politics and religion to 80s nostalgia and modern celebs, *Robot Chicken* is consistently unpredictable, with plenty of "O h - n o - they-didn't" l a u g h s packed in to every skit-filled episode. This third installment features clay cameos by Smokey the Bear, Nicole Richie, Jesus and Hermey the Elf, to name a few.

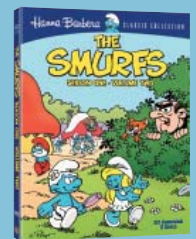
Season Three comes on a two-disc set of the 20 regular episodes. The epic *Star Wars* special was previously released as a standalone DVD, but we're sure it's already sitting on your shelf—right?!

[Release date: Oct. 7] ■



Let's Go Smurfin' Now:

Turner releases *The Smurfs: Season One, Vol. Two* on DVD Oct. 7. Don't be blue, it's only \$26.98!



A Revealing Anime Flashback

Digital Meme's four-disc DVD offers a wonderful look at the early years of animation in Japan.

by Charles Solomon

In the 1960s, Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* began what we now call "anime," but Japan boasted an indigenous animation industry decades earlier, as an important new DVD compilation titled *Japanese Anime Classic Collection* demonstrates.

Oten Shimokawa is usually credited with making the first Japanese animated film, the drawn-on-film *Mukuzo Imokawa the Doorman* (1917), and recently discovered fragments suggest artists may have been experimenting with frame-by-frame filmmaking in Kyoto more than a decade earlier. The *Classic Collection* focuses on the work of the first Japanese studios from 1928 to 1940.

Rather than the slapstick gags that typify American animation from the 20s and 30s, Japanese filmmakers concentrated on storytelling. Not surprisingly, most of the stories are adapted from Japanese folk tales. Momotaro, the hero born from a giant peach, makes an appearance in *Momotaro the Undeclared* (*Nihon-ichi Momotaro*, 1928), conquering a castle full of demons with his loyal animal friends. Samurai—or little boys aspiring to be samurai—fight an array of traditional monsters that includes *tengu* (mountain goblins), *kappa* (water imps) and *oni* (demons). The bizarre-looking ghosts that range from floating heads to hopping, one-eyed umbrella creatures echo the imagery in old paintings and woodblock prints.

While there's a certain amount of physical comedy in the shorts, there's also cartoon violence that feels more serious than its Western equivalent. Unlike their counterparts in American animated films, when a Japanese monster gets clobbered, it dies and it stays dead.

Although many of these films display American influences, the cultural cross-pollination takes surprising forms. Except for a few Mickey Mouse clones and a blatant copy of the first version of *The Ugly Duck-*

ling, *The Duckling Saves the Day* (*Ahiru no Otegara*, undated), Walt Disney's work seem to have had a minimal impact on the Japanese animators. The shorts of the Fleischer Studio and the early Harmon-Ising cartoons exercised a greater influence. The title character's movements in *Taro's Monster Hunt* (*Furudera no Obake-sodo*) and



Taro's Early Training Days (*Hinomaru Taro: Musha Shyugo no Maki*, both 1936) recall Bosko and Buddy in the early Leon Schlesinger films, although they move even more stiffly.

Despite the international popularity of Felix the Cat and the early Mickey Mouse, rubber hose animation never really caught on with the Japanese artists. They continued using outline figures long after their Western counterparts had switched to more flexible, solid black characters. The outline style makes many of the films look older than they are, a problem compounded by the fact that the animation is often quite limited.

Some of the most interesting films present propaganda messages. In *Mabo's Big Race* (*Mabo no Daikyo*, 1936) the title character wins a long distance race and

the pole vault for Japan at the Berlin Olympics, although he cheats. In contrast, the Monkey in *Swim, Monkey, Swim* (*Oyoge-ya Oyoge*, 1939) gives back the trophy he won by riding on the back of a kappa. But *Swim, Monkey, Swim* was produced at a time when the Japanese government was trying to improve the physical condition of the men who were being conscripted into the military.

Particularly revealing is Kindai Eigasha's *Gulliver's Great Activities* (*Gulliver Funtoki*, 1950), made at a time when the Japanese media were monitored and censored by the Occupation forces under Douglas MacArthur. The design for Gulliver and the other visuals are obviously modeled on the 1939 Fleischer feature, but the content has been significantly altered. The Lilliputians free Gulliver as soon as they tie him up. In return, he rebuilds levees after a flood, extinguishes a forest fire and helps create and sell "Domestic Goods and Export Goods." At the end of the film, the Lilliputians ask Gulliver to "stay with us forever!" It's a textbook example of the image of the Occupation the Allies wanted to project.

The *Anime Classic Collection* includes only one real example of a WWII Imperial propaganda film. In *Sankichi the Monkey: Air Combat* (*Osaru no Sankichi: Bokusen*, 1942), a peaceful monkey kingdom defeats an air raid launched by a squadron of bears; "Protect Our Skies!" The same monkey character had previously appeared in *The Assault*

Troops of Sankichi the Monkey (1935), a stylized depiction of the Sino-Japanese War in which monkeys seize a fortress defended by ineffectual Chinese pandas. Audiences are still awaiting a video release of *Sankichi's* complete adventures, as well as the first Japanese animated features, *Momotaro, the Brave Soldier* (*Momotaro no Umi-washi*, 1943) and *Momotaro, Divine Sailor* (*Momotaro—Umi no Shinpei*, 1944).

This intriguing anthology suggests just how rich early Japanese animation was. Every serious student of animation history will want—and should have—the *Japanese Anime Classic Collection*. The four-disc set is available online from Digital Meme: ¥12,800, about \$110 at the current exchange rate. ■

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A Modern Fairy Tale

It took years of development and tinkering, but Disney's new CG-animated *Tinker Bell* finally earns her wings this month. *by Jake Friedman*

Disney's new direct-to-DVD movie, *Tinker Bell*, was a long time coming. After all, Peter Pan's feisty companion is almost as much of a Disney icon as the Mouse himself. To synchronize the push of the new fairy franchise, the creative folks over at Disney had the daunting task of taking the emblematic pixie and turning her into a movie star. The end result may make the most creative minds at Disney not only filled with happy thoughts, but also downright proud of their work.

"It's such a great project," says *Tinker Bell* director Brad Raymond (*Pocahontas II*, *The Lion King 1 1/2*), who has become an expert in delivering DVD sequels to the studio's animated releases. "It's about Tinker Bell's origins in Never Land, what makes Tinker Bell who she is and finding her place in her world."

and having him over your shoulder helping you with that was an incredible process."

Raymond and screenwriter Jeff Howard worked together to create an engaging story that would win Lasseter's approval. "Jeff and I thought, 'What would be the best way to set up that world with a story that would be entertaining?' It just felt natural to tell Tinker Bell's origin story, to take a character we know and love and follow her through her world." J. M. Barrie's original Peter Pan story was used canonically for fairy lore (a fairy is born from a baby's first laugh). "We pitched the story to John a number of times, and at each pitch he added to it and made it better," offers Raymond.

A few of Lasseter's tricks of the trade found their way into the *Tinker Bell* movie. "He really understands the importance of relate-ability

"He really knows Disney magic, and he's the most artist-friendly boss I've ever worked for," says Raymond. "John loved the final film—he's seen it every step of the way."



Bradley Raymond

Another Disney luminary, Andreas Deja, gave further artistic support to Raymond's design team. "Redesigning the character in CG wasn't easy. We wanted her silhouette to look and feel like Tinker Bell, so we had Andreas look at it," says Raymond. "He gave us a very detailed chalk talk on some key elements in her design. He had talked with Marc Davis numerous times about his design of Tinker Bell, so it was almost like having Marc there showing us how to draw her."

To give Tink's home a fairy feel, art director Fred Warter was relied upon to create something unique. "The different settings are part of the magic of relating to these characters," says Raymond. "When we start off in London, it's a little more realistic. Pixie Hollow, though, is in the mountains of Never Land. We wanted to keep that same style, and the mountains in the distance are the rounded mountains from Never Land, but we wanted it to stand on its own. We used art nouveau styles to give it a slightly more stylistic world. There are a lot of curves and straights in the lines, echoing Mary Blair's concept sketches of Peter Pan." Warter also created a color script for the film, which gives visual cues that follow Tinker Bell's journey.

The film was written and designed at the DisneyToon Studios in Burbank and animated by India's Prana Studios, using a Maya platform. The production team took a few trips overseas, but mostly relied on video conferencing to compromise with the thirteen-hour time difference. Raymond estimates around 500 people in total worked together to meet their 20-month production schedule.

"It was a little daunting to tackle the film," concludes Raymond, "but with John Lasseter and a great crew throughout the process, it was a chance of a lifetime. It was an incredible honor to see her origin story, and it makes it a bit easier when you have a great character to start with." ■

Tinker Bell will be released on DVD (\$29.99) and Blu-ray (\$34.99) October 28 by Walt Disney Home Entertainment.

One Pixie's Beginning: Mae Whitman voices the titular fairy in Disney's new CG-animated movie, *Tinker Bell*. The all-star cast includes Anjelica Huston, Kristen Chenoweth, America Ferrera, Raven-Symoné, Lucy Liu, Jesse McCartney and Rob Paulsen.



Not surprisingly, Disney's chief creative officer, John Lasseter, has played a big role in guiding the project along and mentoring Raymond throughout the production process. "The first thing John said when he came in is that he loves seeing worlds created," says Raymond, "and of course he's done that time and time again in the Pixar movies. It was his idea to jump in using the book *In the Realm of the Never Fairies* [Disney Press] as inspiration and build the world from there. It was a lot of fun creating such a rich world,

and how the audience's world connects to the world you're showing," says Raymond. "There's the magic of nature like snowflakes and the leaves changing, and it was John who said, 'What if fairies are the ones that bring that to our world?' He also helps us understand that everything—the story, the costumes, the props—all has to connect with that world." Raymond points out that may be something as simple as a fairy vehicle: A miniature wooden cart was redesigned out of a hollow gourd, with acorns for wheels.

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These Little Piggies Went Everywhere!

National Geographic Kids and Mercury Filmworks combine sparkling animation and plenty of heart to bring Holly Hobbie's *Toot & Puddle* to the small screen.

by Mercedes Milligan

For those who struggled through childhood without Holly Hobbie's delightful *Toot & Puddle* picture books, help is on the way! The new animated preschool series from National Geographic Kids Entertainment, which airs on Noggin this fall, is the perfect introduction to the two adventurous porcine pals. Though *Toot* and *Puddle* have no trouble charming fans of all ages, what truly sets their new TV incarnation apart is the gorgeous animation, courtesy of Canada's Mercury Filmworks.

Most of Mercury's design legwork came straight from the books: "Holly's art leaps off the page and does an incredible job of describing each character both physically and emotionally," says Mercury founder and exec producer Clint Eland (*Wilbur*, *Ruby Gloom*), "So it was only a matter of distilling it to a cleaner design that would support animation." However, distilling the illustrations affected their expressiveness, but with some trial and error the studio was able to recapture the emotionality of the books in the animation.

"We already use a more powerful 2D system in Toon Boom Animation's Harmony product," Eland explains, "But the director, Christian Larocque, felt that the level of animation

needed to properly 'characterize' the cast was too subtle and detailed for standard digital techniques." First-time director Larocque spent countless hours experimenting with the software, and with the help of Mercury's in-house team was able to develop a technique which allowed for a traditional, "illustrated" look with the speed and perfected quality of digital

2D. "From a production perspective, this technique takes the same amount of time and costs the same amount of money [about \$300,000 per half hour] as a show using a more standard technique, but the production value is much higher,"

Eland explains. Naturally, he adds, this technique is a bit of a secret.

"I'm just thrilled to see a beautifully stunning final product," says VP of development

for National Geographic Kids Ent.

Tara Sorensen (*Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*), who also served as an exec producer on the show, "I've been following these books for 10 years and it's really a dream come true to finally get them produced. And,

on top of it, to work with such wonderful partners as Mercury."

NGKE had acquired the book rights for *Toot & Puddle* years ago, and in 2006 produced an animated holiday special with another company. The success of the special confirmed for Sorensen and her colleagues that the piggies had plenty of toon appeal.

Eland and Sorensen are eager to praise each side's contributions to the project—"I think the animation is absolutely stunning!" gushes Sorensen, a lifelong fan of the property—and the show is clearly the result of a perfect partnership. "National Geographic understands how the commercial and creative imperatives need to work together in order to produce a program that is loved universally in all countries, and that has the potential to develop into a broader preschool franchise." Eland says, "In this respect we needed their input and steerage—Not just their marketing muscle!" Sorensen and NGKE's president of kids program-



Clint Eland



Tara Sorensen



ming and production, Donna Friedman Meir, were happy to oblige.

An important aspect of the development process was the involvement of *Toot & Puddle*'s creators, husband-and-wife team Douglas and Holly Hobbie. "As the creators of this property, Holly and Doug have lived with these pigs longer than any of us," explains Sorensen, "It was key to have them involved as we took these properties from books to television." Though the couple was not familiar with animation production, they soon

became accustomed to the process. "As we hit our stride on the series, the Hobbies reached a certain comfort level with us and their notes trailed off," Sorensen adds, "Holly and Doug have been extremely complimentary on the final product, and I'm thrilled."

The Hobbies didn't just give their blessing, they also provided artistic guidance for Eland's Ottawa-based crew: "The production team went to visit Douglas and Holly Hobbie at their farm in rural Massachusetts. They spent a day talking about the look and feel of the series and absorbing the country-craftsman atmosphere of their home, which was Holly's artistic inspiration," he says. These rustic inspirations are evident in the colorful, homey quality of the series' sets, whether in Toot and Puddle's cozy kitchen or the wooded pond where the piglets meet up with the other creatures of Woodcock Pocket. Even the exotic locales the friends explore are imbued with warmth and familiarity.

The show's visuals aren't the only as-



building the stories up from the characters themselves and the dynamics of their friendship.

Despite the deep involvement of all parties, the show itself came together at a remarkable pace: "From the time we had an agreement with National Geographic to option the television rights to the books

only did we [at National Geographic] want to expose preschoolers to the world around them, but we needed to make it accessible to them. I don't know of any other preschool shows on television that open up the world to the preschool set in this way."

One of the key lessons of *Toot & Puddle* is understanding and accepting the diversity we encounter in the real world. But instead of the learn-by-rote call and answer sessions or chastising lessons about hurt feelings one tends to find in kids' edutainment, this series uses enthusiasm and positivity about the new and different to carry its message. While Toot may trek through the mysterious jungle and join in with a tribal drum circle, Puddle is inspired by these strange adventures to create his own drum out of a backyard rain barrel—taking the exotic away from something to be tolerated and turning it into something that parallels children's everyday lives, without preaching.

But above all, *Toot & Puddle* is about adventure. "For National Geographic, this property was right on mission for us," says Sorensen, "We always talk about NGKE's formal mission of 'Exciting kids to explore their world,' whether it's as small as their backyard or as big as the universe." ■

Toot & Puddle makes it U.S. debut November 16 with back-to-back episodes on Noggin, and currently airs on Canada's Treehouse Tuesdays at 10:30 a.m. For more information, see www.natgeoTV-int.com or www.mercuryfilmworks.com.



pect filled with inspiration. "Every panel in the books felt like fodder for a new story," Sorensen enthuses, "And, considering the world is their playground, we had a hard time narrowing down the stories. We also wanted to make sure that Puddle's adventures at home were as exciting as Toot's adventures abroad." Writer Stu Krieger, whose credits include *The Land Before Time* and Disney's *Zenon* television features, put emphasis on

to production was around four to six months," marvels Eland, "In my experience, this is very fast." The fact that all the partners were familiar with the books as well as the holiday special (which served as sort of a "back door" pilot) meant there was little room for second-guessing.

"Our stories focus on great friendships and great adventures, and I think these adventures set us apart from other preschool fare," observes Sorensen, "Not

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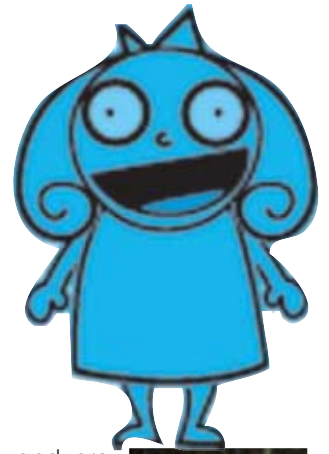
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Best Fiends Forever

It took almost four years, but Amy Winfrey's popular *Making Fiends* series makes a triumphant transition from the web to NickToons this month. **by Ramin Zahed**



TELEVISION

WWW.ANIMATIONMAGAZINE.NET

Over the past decade, media visionaries have been predicting that home-made animated projects will be able to make the leap from the web to television. This month, thanks to L.A.-based artist Amy Winfrey and her ever-growing family of Flash-animated monsters, we'll see the hype become a reality as her whimsical web toon, *Making Fiends*, evolves into a TV show on NickToons.

Fans of Winfrey's show are already familiar with Vendetta, the diabolical green girl who conjures up an assortment of "fiends" to torment her classmate, a cheerful girl named Charlotte, and to wreak havoc at school. Six half-hour episodes of the show have been produced to date, and the team is preparing seven more, according to Winfrey. It may all seem like an overnight success, but it took the 32-year-old animator a lot of hard work and

months of waiting after the Nick development folks discovered her site and introduced it first on the cabler's online channel, TurboNick.

"I didn't even think I could be an animator when I was going to school at UCLA," says Winfrey, who started out as a pre-med major and segued into Toon Town after taking animation courses. "I was taking an interactive class at UCLA and that led to a short I created [*The Bad Planet*] which won a Student Academy Award in 2000. I had also done something on traffic cones, and I was getting all kinds of e-mails about it from people around the world. Before that, I never really considered I could pursue animation as a living. I took the animation class just as a lark!"

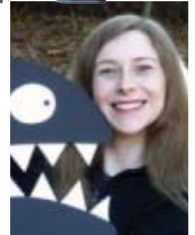
Winfrey, who has the habit of drawing her various fiends on tiny sketchbooks wherever she goes, worked on the first seven episodes of *South Park* as well as

the movie and created two other web toons called *Muffin Films* and *Big Bunny* before diving into the world of Vendetta, Charlotte and their menagerie of monsters. After creating *Making Fiends*, she paid her bills by selling tie-in shirts and DVDs on her website.

She got the call from the execs at Nickelodeon in February of 2004, right as she and her husband Peter Merryman were about to leave for their honeymoon in Greece. (Nick's then-development exec Peter Gal learned about *Making Fiends* through *The X's* show runner Dave Marshall, whose teenage daughter was a big fan of the series.)

"I was doing well on my own, but I was getting tired of animating everything myself," says Winfrey. "Four and a half years later, I have to say it wasn't a bad development process." Of course, she had to make a few adjustments. Among the things she was told: "Don't mention Hitler" and "Don't hit people on the head." They also didn't like a school sign that said "A is for Alimony"—she changed that to "A is for Abomination!"

The format of the Nick show allows for three seven-minute episodes. "It adds another level of craziness and makes each episode more action-packed," notes Winfrey. "I can tell more elaborate



Amy Winfrey



NOV•08

35

stories. The backgrounds are a little more elaborate, too. When I was doing the show for the web, I would use tiny texture and made the files small. Now the backgrounds are more complex and the characters have become cleaner, too."

As Nick's VP of current series animation Roland Poindexter points out, "Transitioning from web show to TV show was a simple matter of refining the character models, sharpening the color palette and working with Amy and her talented writing staff to expand on all of the great ideas and stories that she produced for her web-site."

Helping out with the animation production of the show are Cyber Chicken in Korea and DQ studios in India, which are also working in Flash. "We were working at a crazy pace, and I had to learn how to tell people what I wanted, because before I wouldn't even do storyboards. We had about 30 people working on it in some capacity."

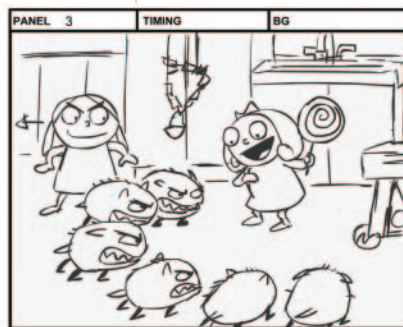
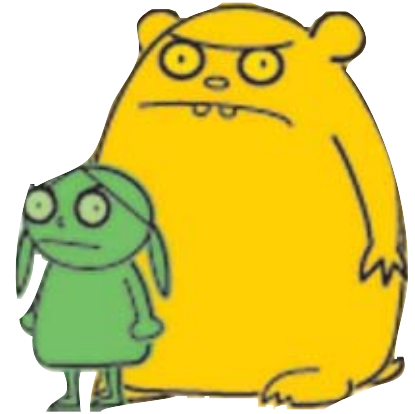
Monsters Among Us

Many of the animation team also helped out with the voices. Winfrey's husband co-wrote and did voices for the show as did supervising director Dave Wasson (*Time Squad*, *The Buzz on Maggie*) and Winfrey's friend, character designer Aglaia Mortcheva, who provides the Bulgarian-accented voice of Vendetta.

Winfrey, who also sings and writes lyrics, is quite thrilled about the contributions of the show's composer, Ego Plum. "I first met him at the Student Academy Award ceremony. He brings a lot of interesting ideas, using toy instruments and out-of-tune stuff and samples. He enjoys things that aren't perfect ... everything is slightly off!"

After seeing her web baby take off on TV this month, Winfrey will be working on another imaginative web creation—this one is called *Squid and Frog* and will be a puppet-based project.

For now, she is happy to see *Making Fiends* win a whole new audience on NickToons. "I am very happy with the fact that I was able to make a show on my own and then get contacted by a TV studio—and they allowed me to keep almost everything about my show the same! That couldn't have happened 10 years ago. I can't imagine



Vendetta moves towards o.s.

DIAL
CHARLOTTE(cont): I love puppies!



going to a studio and pitching them an idea that

goes like this, 'There's this green girl and this blue girl ... and one of them is going to be voiced by a friend of mine who isn't a professional actress, and, oh, I do the other character!' I don't think that would go through the usual development process!"

So, besides hanging on to the mer-

chandising rights, what kind of advice does she have for all the future Amy Winfreys hoping to build popular toons on their computers at night? "Keep making your films!" she says. "People get bogged down by their first film. Keep making them even if they don't look perfect. Just keep doing it to get the experience." ■

Making Fiends premieres on NickToons on Oct. 4 at 11:30 a.m. and airs Sat. and Sundays at that time.

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A Globetrotting Mouse of Exceptional Talents

Journalist, adventurer and children's publishing sensation Geronimo Stilton is poised to make a graceful leap to the small screen thanks to the efforts of an international team of producers and artists. **by Ramin Zahed**



It's always a thrill to sense the influence of an old animation or comic-book master on a new animated series. That's certainly true for the new 26-part show *Geronimo Stilton*, which is based on a popular series of books first published in Italy by Edizioni Piemme in 2000 and picked up by Scholastic in the U.S. in 2004. Produced by Italy's Atlantica Entertainment and France's Moon-Scoop Productions (with the participation of Italy's RAI and France's M6), *Geronimo* is a wonderful throwback to the adventures of Donald Duck, Uncle Scrooge and the nephews immortalized by the late Disney comics artist Carl Barks.

The brainchild of Italian author Elisabetta Dami, the hero of the series is a journalist mouse who lives in New Mouse City on Mouse Island. When he's not working at *The Rodent's Gazette*, Geronimo is getting into all kinds of wild adventures with his clever nine-year-old nephew, Benjamin. The "autobiographical" books are all written from Geronimo's point of view.

Overseeing the show's animation at Woodland Hills-based Mike Young Productions is Guy Vasilovich, the Emmy-nominated animation director whose credits include *Growing Up Creepie*

and who has also worked on Disney features such as *The Fox and the Hound*, *The Black Cauldron* and *The Great Mouse Detective*. "It's always a bit of a challenge when you're adapting a popular franchise," says Vasilovich. "You want to maintain the integrity of what the kids loved about the books in the

"When I first saw the books' illustrations, they really sparked something in terms of creativity and design ... One of their stand-out qualities is that there are a lot of sketches and graphics within the text."

—Guy Vasilovich, *Geronimo Stilton's* animation director



first place, but you also need to modify the books' illustrations for the characters to make them more animatable and add a more contemporary look."

As Atlantica Entertainment's producer Karen K. Miller (*Baby Blues*, *The Simpsons Movie*) explains, "*Geronimo Stilton* is a global property, but has a local appeal and we have been respectful of that. We have the challenge of keeping the integrity of the character and the property intact, which I think Guy and his team have done a wonderful job of doing."

"The results of the character design have

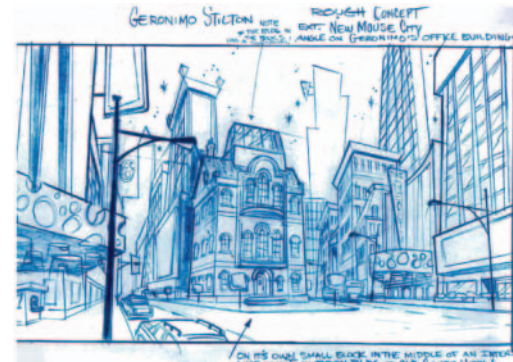
been very satisfying," says exec producer Caterina Vacchi, who is also Atlantica Entertainment's animation division director. "Geronimo and his friends are very recognizable, and at the same time, they're suitable for TV audiences. Geronimo is thinner and athletic and he chooses to wear contact lenses! Benjamin looks older in the show. He's a brilliant young boy and you can see this quality reflected in his design."

The casting of veteran Canadian voice actor Brian Drummond as Geronimo helped Vasilovich and his team get a clear idea of what the animated mouse would look like. "We auditioned a number of actors, but he really nailed the voice," says Vasilovich. "He had to have a likeable voice, but he also had to sound like the fun uncle, someone with whom kids would like to go on adventures. That really sparked the imagination of the artists and sped up the development process."

Vasilovich says our hero is a bit fussy when it comes to technology and relies on his nephew Benjamin to deal with 21st century gizmos. "Although Geronimo owns his own media empire, he runs his paper with integrity, unlike his rival from across the street who crosses the line. But the great thing about the show is that we're not just around the newspaper office. Thanks to his adventures,

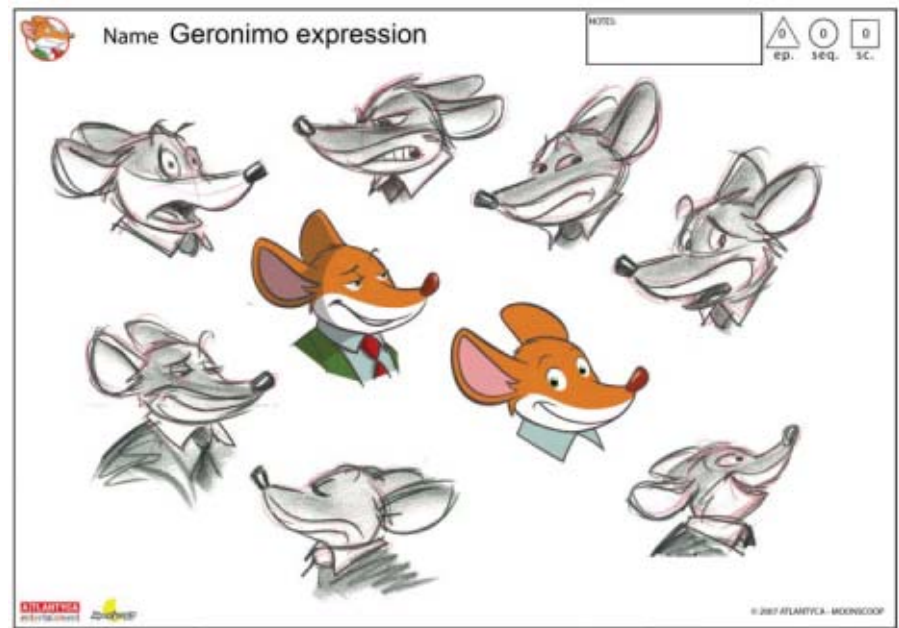
we find ourselves in a jungle, in Chinatown, up in the mountains where he has a Kung Fu-type encounter."

The *Stilton* universe certainly has the right balance of comedy and adventure elements. "The market is swamped with shows that are either comedies or



boys' adventures," says Vasilovich. "Yet, it's always difficult to do a good show that has just the right amount of comedy and adventure. The key is to create the characters with the kind of personalities that the viewer wants to be involved with their plights and go along on a rollercoaster ride. When I first saw the illustrations, they really sparked something in terms of creativity and design ... One of the books' stand-out qualities is that there are a lot of sketches and graphics within the text—and we've incorporated that in the animation."

The issue of communication between the many production partners and animation facilities was a huge challenge for the team. "Mike Young Productions



in Woodland Hills, Calif.; Atlantyca in Milan, Italy; MoonScoop in Paris, France; Enarmonia Animation Studio in Turin, Italy; Toon City in Manila, Philippines and DQ Entertainment in Hyderabad, India are all involved with the show," says Vasilovich, "and our recording studio is in Vancouver! So we're on the phone and Skyping each other constantly." He also notes that some days he communicates more with people in Europe than he does in his own city. "All of our partners are very excited about this property and there seems to be this great synergy among us, and that's very rare when you're working on international productions."

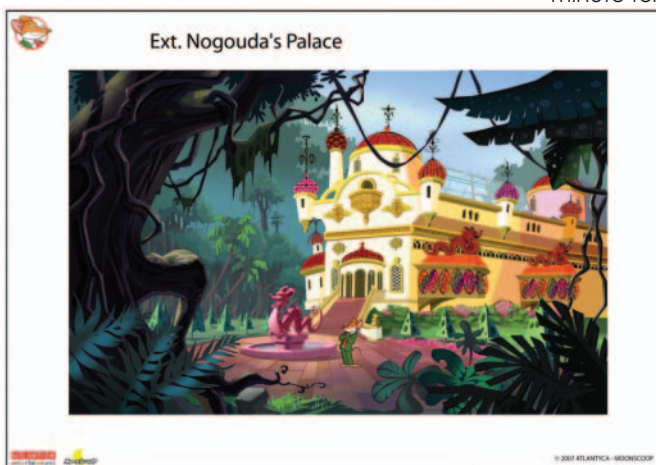
Staying true to the gentle tone of the books, the animation style is 2D, although the artists do everything digitally and take advantage of the many perks of Toon Boom's Storyboard Pro. "We wanted to maintain the classic quality of the books, so we chose to not do it in CG because the characters would look too stiff and couldn't have the nuance of emotions for a 22-minute format."

After all is said and done, you can really judge whether a TV series is successful by its ability to recreate that range of emotions for its main characters. As Atlantyca's supervising producer, Nicolò Sacchi, explains, "The Geronimo books were launched less than eight

years ago, and he is already famous in the eyes of children globally. They are truly in love with him and his quirky characteristics. Reading the books, children become immersed in who he is [the stories are 'written' by Geronimo], imagining how he walks, runs, talks and acts. We are working very hard to be sure we meet the expectations of Geronimo's fans. Through every single phase of production, we find ourselves asking, 'Would he really act or talk that way?' Putting ourselves in a mouse's shoes is indeed a very entertaining challenge!"

Vasilovich echoes his Italian colleague's feelings. "I'm always attracted to shows that are creative and artist-driven," he says. "There are ways to make a show based on an existing character fun. I hope that studios embrace that a little more. Sometimes in this business, people forget that we're trying to entertain our audience—which is the kids. People are just trying to please a network and everyone is giving notes. What's funny to a kid is not always predictable. You can look back at the shows you liked when you were a kid. You certainly knew which shows were authentic and which weren't and you certainly knew why you liked them. It's so important not to forget that fun factor and to try and put yourself in the mindset of the kids!" ■

Geronimo Stilton is expected to make its global TV debut fall of 2009.



Japan's Dentsu Looks to the West

The epic anime series, *Deltora Quest*, is one of Dentsu L.A.'s first new adventures. **by Ramin Zahed**

In the past few years, many companies involved in the distribution of Japanese anime properties have been hit hard by the growing trend of fans putting up pirated content online for the public. However, the newly launched DCI Los Angeles (a division of Japan's advertising giant Dentsu) hopes to bridge the gap between the East and the West by developing, co-producing, distributing and licensing original animated content.

"Although Japanese animation has achieved significant global success, many productions we currently see in development do not have broad appeal outside of Japan," says Yuma Sakata, senior VP of DCI-L.A. "Working with Western partners in pre-production, and then with production teams in

sensibilities. Our goal is to develop and pre-produce with North American partners and then work with Dentsu's TV division in Tokyo to finalize character design and complete animation. Our two target markets are boys' action and males 17 to 25, where Japanese animation has traditionally experienced the most success."

DCI-L.A. will be funding 50 percent or more of any new project, depending on how the licensing, ancillary and distrib rights are divided between partners. According to Harrington, the company is working with

books written by Australian author Emily Rodda, *Deltora Quest* is a 65-episode 2D series. The books, which have sold over 10 million copies worldwide, center on an epic quest for a magical belt in a mythical land. The multi-layered storyline involves a young heroic lead (Lief), a wise companion and protector (Barda), a young heroine who communicates with trees and animals (Jasmine) and a group of evil characters led by the Shadow Lord. Directed by Mitsuru Hongo, the series has developed a strong following since its debut on the Saturday morning block of TV Tokyo Network's TV Aichi channel and webcaster Bandai Channel Kids in 2007.

Japan's Oriental Light and Magic produced the animation for the show.

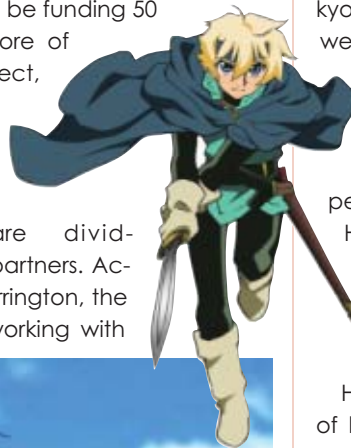
"Clearly, there is a universal appeal built in to the property," notes Harrington. "The stories have resonated with fans, and the animation is top-notch ... the three-dimensional bad guys give it an extra layer of intrigue and intensity!"

Harrington, who was the former head of business development at the now-defunct Geneon, comes up with the perfect analogy of what DCI-L.A. is doing: He compares it to making California rolls. "It's about being able to take a classic Japanese creation [like sushi], incorporate some American ideas, and then present it to both markets successfully," he offers. "Historically, much of the animation created in Japan has been very successful worldwide, but some of the storytelling elements do not translate well around the world. We would like to infuse the incredible techniques and visual style of Japanese animation with some 'Western' ideas and story traditions to create a blend that will truly appeal to a global audience. California rolls are now a popular 'mainstay' in sushi restaurants worldwide—even in Tokyo!" ■

For more info about *Deltora Quest*, visit www.deltoraquest.jp or www.scholastic.com/deltora.



Marc Harrington



Japan for animation, we can create content that can appeal to a wider audience."

The new company aims to produce two series a year, with plans of delivering the first one in mid-2009. As Marc Harrington, DCI-L.A.'s VP of business development explains, "We're focusing on Japanese animation with 'Western'

an approximate budget of \$7 million for new projects. DCI-L.A. is also handling distribution and merchandising rights for Decode's *Chop Socky Chooks*, which airs on Cartoon Network, and distributing the English-language version of the anime import, *Deltora Quest*.

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Mondo TV's Angel Friends Spread Their Wings

Italy's Mondo TV has been one of the key players in the European animation scene for over two decades. Now the Rome-based studio has started an aggressive push in Europe and hopes to expand its plans in the U.S. in the next couple of years. The latest addition to the studio's big catalog of colorful toons is *Angel Friends*, a 52 x 13 production created by Simona Ferri.

"The first ideas for the show came together in 2005, while Simona [Ferri] got a lot of positive feedback about them at the Bologna Book Fair last year," says Mondo TV's spokesperson Micheline Azoury. "A demo pilot was presented at MIPTV in the spring, where it was received as the next big branded kids' show."

Targeting the in-demand tween audience of six to 13, *Angel Friends* centers on five main characters: Gabi, Urié, Raf, Dolce and Ang-Li, all popular residents of Angie Town. In order to accomplish their goals of becoming 100 percent angels, they have to go through a residency period on Earth, where they help five humans in their daily lives. But, wouldn't you know it, five devils-in-training are also going through the same "internship" period, causing all kinds of

trouble for the angels and their humans!

The show's creator says she was heavily influenced by classic Disney animated features and Japanese manga. "When I was a child, I used to watch all the Disney movies and series, but that era was also the golden age of manga and Japanese cartoons in Italy," says Ferri. "Now, I see that both sources of inspiration are evident in the new series."

Just last month, Mondo TV signed a production deal with Play Entertainment to produce the toon. "Between 20 and 30 graphic artists are assigned to the project at the company's Rome headquarters and another 500 animators are working on it at Korean Graphics, its large animation lab in Korea," notes Azoury. Other partners include Mondo Home Entertainment, Mediaset and Starbright for Italy and Suk (market analysis programs for "Kids" target).

What prompted the studio to greenlight the production was frequent requests from family and children's TV channels for shows that target the "tween" audience. "We see them as very distinct viewers," says Azoury. "They're part of their families and still like to be with their parents, but

they are old enough to understand pop culture. Their views on the world and their tastes are much more refined than younger kids, and they can appreciate different levels of humor."

According to Matteo Corradi, Mondo TV's international sales manager and board member, the studio produces at least four series and movies every year for the preschool-to-tween market. "Sales are generated by the firm's international sales team, operating from a network of Mondo TV offices in major markets. We are an integrated entertainment and education company, a leading commercial animation studio in Italy and one of the largest in Europe."

Corradi believes that the animation industry is on the cusp of a big comeback in Italy. He adds, "However, Mondo TV never stopped producing two to four series and movies every year for the Italian market as well as international broadcasters." Among Mondo's latest projects is a 6.4 million euro (roughly \$9 million) series based on Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (26 x 26), co-produced with Italy's RAI TV.

We're sure international audiences will be watching closely as the impeccably dressed *Angel Friends* battle the devils and earn their wings on the global stage in the fall of 2009. ■

For more info about *Angel Friends* and Mondo TV, visit www.mondotv.it.



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Format: 52 x 11'

Genre: Puppetry children's series

Delivery: Spring 2009

Head Writer: Kathy Waugh, three time Emmy-award winner, and recently also head writer on the US hit show „Peep and the Big Wide World“.
Executive Produced by Jack Lenz & Anne Brogan
Produced by Kindle Entertainment
A Kindle Entertainment / 3J's Entertainment production for BBC,
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Big Storms in Modern China

How 21st-century animation models are reviving classic tales and characters in the fast-changing country.

by Alex S. Dai

This year's box-office success of *Kung Fu Panda* and *The Storm Rider* has demonstrated that there's a market for animated films in China, and Chinese local filmmakers have begun adopting marketing strategies that can help them tap into this market.

By the end of August, *The Storm Rider* took in over 30 million yuan (\$4.4 million) at the box office, while DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda* earned nearly 186 million yuan (\$27 million), becoming the first animated film to pass the 100 million yuan mark. The new marketing strategies include distribution partnerships with foreign companies, new merchandising techniques and mining old animation vaults for popular themes and characters. A new openness to partnerships with foreign partners is helping Chinese filmmakers find international distribution, improve revenues and bring in new material.

"The strong performance of *The Storm Rider* is all thanks to this new marketing and distribution business model," Wang Lei, deputy director of the film and TV drama center at the Shanghai Media Group (SMG), tells *Animation Magazine*.

Adapted from a well-known Hong Kong comic book by Ma Rongcheng, *The Storm Rider* was targeted at a global audience—especially the Asia market for which it was conceived, says Wang. Long before the film was finished, SMG began talking to overseas and domestic distributors and cinemas about the story and held test screenings for them, he adds.

According to SMG, which co-produced the movie with Shenzhen-based Puzzle Animation Studio, the movie broke the domestic animated film record previously held by *Lotus Lantern*, which earned just 24 million yuan (\$3.5 million) in 1999.

Although *The Storm Rider* set new records in China, its backers plan to replicate that success throughout the rest of Asia and elsewhere in the world—which, if successful, will be a major break-through for Chinese film. These early talks

with distributors will help *The Storm Rider* get shown on many more screens abroad and at home, Wang says.

The film hasn't been screened abroad yet, but it is set to hit screens in Japan and in South East Asia later this year, according to the group. Wang claims that the early talks with buyers and distributors were important to sparking investor interest.

"Usually, when filmmakers start talking to buyers, most of the film is already done, which makes the risk even higher because all the

playing the role of an organizer who brings resources together, like it did for *The Storm Rider*, instead of simply being the producer of a film.

As the second largest TV broadcaster in China, SMG benefits from having a professional marketing team and already-established relationships with distributors and cinemas—something traditional animation firms don't have and need access to.

"We got together a good story, a famous director, experienced animated film production companies and SMG's advertising network across the Internet, printed publications and TV channels to serve the whole process, right from pre-production till distribution," Wang explains.

Bringing Merchandising to the Masses

This year, the Chinese industry began to embrace merchandising and other promotional tie-ins to a significant degree, using movie-related toys and trading cards both to generate additional revenues and to increase awareness.



money has been spent and they can't make any changes," he explains. "We hope that *The Storm Rider* model will create a successful example for taking our animated films to the international market."

SMG also says that the company has several other animation projects in the works and is looking forward to talking with global investors and production companies at the MIPCOM 2008 confab in Cannes this October, the largest international audiovisual content trade show. "We will bring our film ideas to the conference and pitch them to leading global production companies," Wang says.

Wang also says that SMG hopes to continue

SMG began selling *Storm Rider* related toys and cards months before the movie was screened, in order to attract teenagers from across the nation.

"In addition to the income angle, the real purpose was to establish a popular base for the film's story and its characters," SMG's Wang says. "Selling film-themed toys and products can't be considered as an innovation in other countries, but making tie-in sales before the screening of a film rather than after is a new marketing technique in China."

Besides toys, SMG also organized a "Stamping Relay" promotion, which Wang says is very popular in Japan. Children collect different

cartoon stamps at participating cinemas and get a gift by collecting a certain number of stamps. This is the first time that such a program is being conducted in China, says Wang, who hopes that children would be more involved in the film's story via such promotional strategies, rather than just watching the film.

However, Wang refuses to indulge the financial aspects of such initiatives, adding that currently, merchandising deals are being done for the sole aim of promotion only. "Merchandising will be extended to more forms in the future, such as costumes, publications and video products," Wang adds.

Mining Old Footage

Chinese animation companies have begun mining their vaults to find characters and stories with pre-existing audiences, name recognition and proven appeal: Weeks before *The Storm Rider* was released, another Chinese animated film, Shanghai Animation Film Studio's *The Calabash Brothers*, earned over 10 million yuan at the box office in China, due in part to an audience already familiar with the subject matter.

The Calabash Brothers tells the story of seven boy heroes and their scorpion and snake enemies. The word "calabash" refers to a gourd shaped like a figure eight, common to China.

Unlike *The Storm Rider*, which was adapted from a popular comic book, *Calabash Brothers* was made up of 13 unchanged, but digitally

re-mastered 10-minute TV episodes, which originally aired 22 years ago in China.

"Although *Calabash Brothers* became popular 20 years ago, they still form a vivid memory for people born in the 1970s and '80s," according to Zhou Jun, deputy director at Shanghai Animation Film Studio. In addition to *Calabash Brothers*, the studio has over 400 animated television series in its vaults, with about 660 hours of total footage.



However, Zhou says the studio doesn't just intend to keep recycling old footage, and will also make original films based on these series in the future. "There are lots of successful examples in Japan and other developed markets where popular TV animation series have made the transition to the big screen, like the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*," Zhou says. "And because these characters are well known, you really don't need to worry about a lack of audience."

According to SMG's Wang, the group is looking for local stories and characters that could be even more popular in China than *The Storm Rider*. He cites the example of *Red Cliff*, the historic drama which earned 285 million yuan at the box office in China this summer. "Almost every Chinese person knows the story of *Red Cliff*, and there had to be people who would have wanted to watch a movie about it in theaters," Wang adds. *Red Cliff* is based on the famous Battle of Red Cliff and other events which marked the end of the Han Dynasty.

Foreign companies have long been mining Chinese tales for their stories—such as Disney's *Mulan*. More recently, Walt Disney Company co-produced an animated

"Usually, when filmmakers start talking to buyers, most of the film is already done, which makes the risk even higher because all the money has been spent and they can't make any changes. We hope that the *Storm Rider* model will create a successful example for taking our animated films to the international market."

—Shanghai Media Group's deputy director Wang Lei

2007 Chinese TV Animation Production Top Toon Players Snapshot

Rank	Company Name	No. of Animated Series	Total Minutes Produced
1	Hunan Greatdreams Cartoon Media Ltd.	12	15,148
2	Hunan SunChime Cartoon Group	16	10,014
3	Wuxi TV Station	8	6,116
4	CCTV	13	5,669
5	Guangdong Creative Power Entertainment	7	4,950
6	Chongqing CMay Animation Production Co.	7	3,734
7	Zhejiang Zhongnan Cartoon	4	3,718
8	Shanghai Media Group	5	2,782

Source: The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT)

film in 2007 (its first in China) with China Film Group called *The Magic Gourd*, based on a popular children's story. Screened in June 2007, *The Magic Gourd* earned 20.65 million yuan (\$3 million) at the box office in China.

Jo Yan, senior VP of sales, co-productions and acquisitions for Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures Asia Pacific, believes that *The Magic Gourd* reinvigorated a popular Chinese tale by giving it a contemporary look and feel. Incorporating recognizable Chinese elements into filmmaking will be key to tapping the local audience successfully in the future, Yan predicts.

However, as this year's experience demonstrates, good business practices are already proving to be the key to market success in China. ■

Alex Dai is a Shanghai-based journalist who covers entertainment and sports.

Animation unlimited.

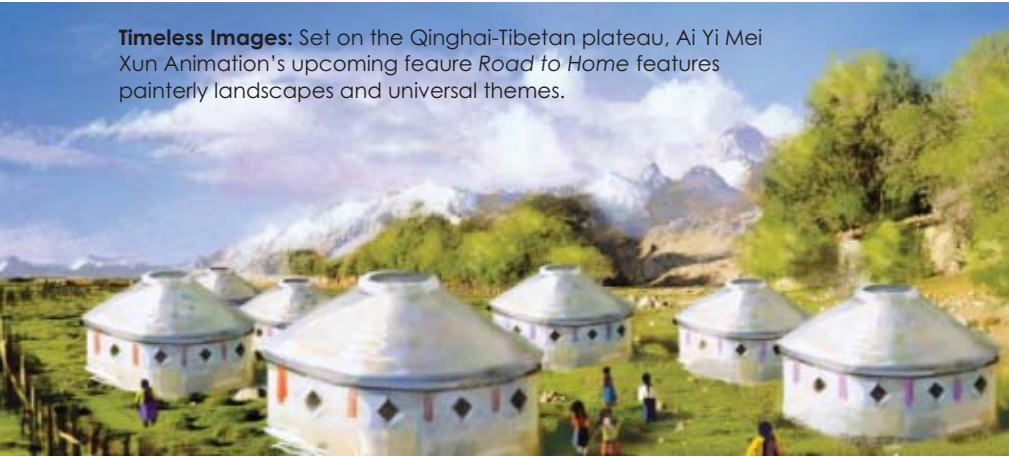


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Timeless Images: Set on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau, Ai Yi Mei Xun Animation's upcoming feature *Road to Home* features painterly landscapes and universal themes.



Cultural Revolution, Take Two

An American expert looks at Chinese animation's winding road home. **by Kevin Geiger**

When is a nation of more than 1.3 billion people a "scrappy underdog?" When it is China seeking to reclaim the animation legacy pioneered by the Wan Brothers in the early 20th century. Shanghaied by Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and then crushed by the juggernaut of Japanese anime, the Chinese animation industry has been reeling for decades (pun intended) in a punch-drunk, outsource-fueled haze of stifled creativity. Until now.

A new generation of Chinese animation filmmakers—versed in influenc-

es from Chuck Jones to Genndy Tartakovsky—has entered the world stage, eager to reclaim lost creative territory with films that are in turn thrilling, hilarious, gorgeous and thoughtful. Among the original animated properties currently in development in China, one receiving serious buzz on the mainland and elsewhere is Beijing-based Ai Yi Mei Xun Animation Company's *Road to Home*, China's first environmentally themed animated feature film. Set on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau, *Road to Home* portrays the unique cultural characteristics of Western China while



Lijun Sun



Wen Feng

addressing universal themes, taking the friendship of a young girl and a wolf cub as its throughline in a manner that is both epic in scope and intimate in tone. Directed by Lijun Sun with creator Wen Feng from a screenplay by Yi Yan, *Road to Home* features lush painterly landscapes and engaging characters—including a pair of breakout comic

sheep twins, Gugu and Lulu, who are sure to be spinning off to a TV set near you.

Yet for all their promise, original Chinese films like *Road to Home* have a tough row to hoe as they attempt to speak to their countrymen and appeal to international audiences while also navigating China's state approval process. Although attitudes are evolving, this remains a reality of filmmaking in China. It has been my pleasure to advise the *Road to Home* team for the better part of this year, and I have been impressed with how skillfully they walk this line. *Road to Home* has garnered significant interest in Taiwan and the U.S. at the same time that an official from China's Ministry of Culture referred to it as "the best [Chinese animated] film in development that I've seen." No small feat, that.

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The concept of balance extends to mainland studios such as Xing Xing Digital, where Western-educated president Lifeng Wang, renowned creative director Becky Bristow and executive producer Steve Katz meld Chinese and U.S. artistic and business sensibilities into a true East/West hybrid. It even extends across the Formosa Strait to Taiwan, where up-and-coming production companies such as SOFA Studio, creators of the popular *MuMuHug* series, hope to leverage friendlier political relations between Taipei and Beijing to benefit animation creators and consumers on both shores. Within the next five years, I anticipate that we will see an outpouring of high-quality, original content from mainland China, facilitated by closer relationships with established Taiwanese studios and co-produced by American and European animation concerns of all shapes and sizes.

So what does the resurgence of original animated content in China mean to you, the *Animation Magazine* reader? Well, if you're an animation fan, it means that you have some fresh voices and perspectives to look forward to. If you're an animation artist, it means not job losses but job opportunities—the chance to assume an impactful leadership position within companies eager for your expertise. And if you're an animation producer, it means exciting new co-production opportunities in the country that sports one out of every five consumers on Earth. In fact, the

compelling economics of the Chinese animation industry (and even, ironically, China's protectionist ban on foreign animation during primetime broadcast hours) open doors to small and mid-level creators in the West who are willing to collaborate with their friends in the East.

As with any business opportunity, however, there are a few things to keep in mind for best results:

- Chinese co-productions are subject to state approval, with specific requirements regarding the business structure of the enterprise and a critical eye on the content (though based on my experience, this approval is no more restrictive or arbitrary than that of your typical Hollywood animation studio).

- The quantity and quality of the Chinese animation workforce continues to rise, and China's "animation industry bases" can provide attractive facility arrangements to co-pro partners. Nevertheless, despite financial players such as Standard Chartered Bank of Hong Kong (one of the first banks in Asia to provide film and TV financing), Chinese animation studios are not generally flush with cash. As a content creator collaborating with a Chinese studio, you're expected to wrap your great ideas in some funding.

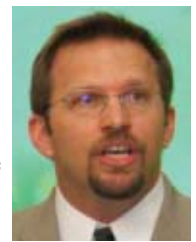
- The Chinese are tough negotiators. I could expound on this at length (and probably will, at some point), but in the meantime I recommend anyone contemplating business in China to read

China Now by N. Mark Lam and John Graham. While not attendant to animation in particular, it contains veil-lifting insights regarding the practical consequences of cultural differences between the Chinese and American negotiating styles.

- The social capital of *guanxi* (literally "relationships") is fundamental to Chinese business: Nothing happens in China without it. The emphasis on relationships means that prospective Western co-production partners must make themselves familiar to the Chinese before any serious business can be conducted. While cultivating the proper *guanxi* in China takes time and money, the long-term payoff is well worth the investment. The barriers and risks of doing business in China are greatly minimized with the right *guanxi*.

As demonstrated by the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese are not at a loss for how to make a profound visual impression. We have much onscreen magic to look forward to from this waking dragon. ■

Kevin Geiger is president and CEO of Animation Options LLC (www.animationoptions.com). He is a 12-year veteran of Disney Feature Animation and guest researcher and professor at Beijing Film Academy.



Kevin Geiger

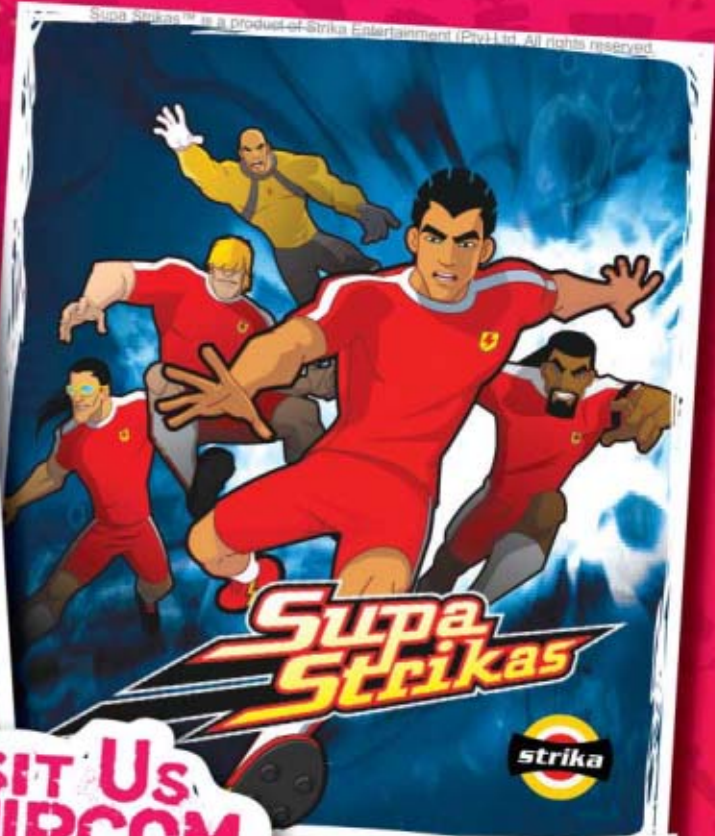
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Broad Comedy

Breakthrough Animation and Canwest's new sitcom takes an animated look at the life of a daytime chat show producer. **by Ramin Zahed**

Breakthrough Animation and Canwest have some great news for fans of larger-than-life actress Kim Cattrall who've been experiencing life-stopping withdrawal symptoms after taking in several screenings of the *Sex and the City* movie this past summer. The talented actress is coming back to the small screen—in animated form—as a self-absorbed, high maintenance star of a daytime chat show in a new primetime toon called *Producing Parker*. This is the first adult programming venture for Breakthrough Animation, which has had an increasing presence in kids TV with popular shows such as *Atomic Betty*, *Captain Flamingo*, *Miss BG* and *Jimmy Two Shoes*, which has been picked up by Disney.

The new 13 x 30 sitcom centers on the misadventures of an overworked TV producer named Parker Kovak (voiced by up-and-coming actress Kristin Booth) who has to deal with the daily demands of TV hostess Dee (Cattrall) and the behind-the-scene shenanigans of the production. (Think of it as an animated *Sex and the City*-meets-*The View*!)

"About two years ago, we decided to develop a show that would fill the demand for grown-up fare for audienc-

es that grew up with animation," says Kevin Gillis, Breakthrough Animation's managing partner and exec producer. "The show's co-creator Laura Kosterksi's concept was exactly what we were looking for. It spoofs the women's talk show format—which is kind of an uncharted territory in animation. We also get to tackle subjects that are appealing to female audiences—like books, relationships, health, diets, fitness, etc."

As Gillis and company began researching their target audience, they made a surprising discovery: Half of the audience of primetime animated shows like *The Simpsons* are women,

age 18-35. "This was a great eye-opener, because every time I've talked about animation with broadcasters, their response is that women don't watch animation ... and we found out that this wasn't true at all."

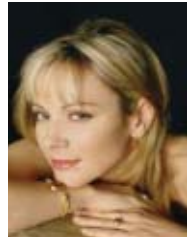


Kevin Gillis

Not Your Usual Office Comedy

So why use animation to stage a grown-up sitcom? Co-creator Gillis believes that the animated universe allows for much wider satiric possibilities and surreal options. "You can really take situations to wonderfully absurd levels," he notes. "I can think of many instances where we couldn't have done it without animation. For example, Parker's pet dog Massimo talks [only in her mind]—to her, the dog represents the perfect man. He cooks for her, offers her great massages, has a glass of wine ready for her after a long day at work. In one episode, Dee gets shot down by a passing fighter jet after trying out an 'inflatable helium butt' (she wanted a J.Lo posterior!). There's no way you can do those storylines in a live-action sitcom."

As shows such as *Family Guy* and *South Park* have proved in recent years, you can also deliver satiric jabs in animation which you wouldn't be able to get away with in a regular



Kim Cattrall



GERONIMO STILTON, A NEW STORY TO TELL!

**FIRST SEASON
AVAILABLE
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**AGES:
6-11**

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sitcom. "In one episode, Dee is dating an ex-senator who has his own workout regimen tapes and speaks with a German accent," says Gillis. "He likes to go on these 'extreme Afghan diets' and visit Third World spas where people get held up for their organs. We really are touching on subjects that you'd see on *The View*, *Oprah* or *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*!"

Obviously, landing the always in-demand Kim Cattrall to voice the self-involved talk show host was a huge coup for the producers. Gillis says the fact that, like the producers and creative team, the actress was Canadian helped a lot! "One night, my wife and I were watching *Sex and the City*, and she says to me, 'Somebody like Kim would be great for the show!'" he recalls. "We knew she was Canadian, so we sent her the script. She's developed an enormous following and it's appropriate that she should play such an important role in this first primetime animated series designed for women."

Cattrall, who played a huge role in making the *Sex and the City* movie one of the biggest box-office hits of 2008, tells *Animation Magazine* that she loves portraying the pushy chat show host in the series. "Dee is devilishly delicious to inhabit," says the Emmy-winning actress. "Her appetite and ego outsize her voluminous hair and bosom. She is a guilty pleasure to perform. Move over, Oprah!"

Another bonus of playing an animated role is that you don't have to worry about many of the tedious aspects of being in front of the camera! "After 35 years of waking up before the rooster crows for early pre-pre-dawn hair/makeup call times on films and TV, I relish getting up much later than the sun with bed head! I lazily brush my teeth, reach for the wash cloth and complete my entire morning skin regime, then leisurely pick out my jeans and t-shirt for the day and head to the recording



Martini Shot:

The creative team at Break-through Animation picked a color palette and contemporary designs that appeal to young urban female audiences.

realize was that in this show, the characters are far, far more expressive than in kids' animation."

Gillis and company set up a mini studio at Break-through's headquar-

ters in Toronto, and along with Mercury Filmworks in Ottawa and PASI studio in the Philippines, are delivering the Flash-based animation.

Gillis gives lot of credit to producing partner Canwest, who allowed them to take extra chances with the subject matter. "We were lucky to get our order of 13 episodes with Canwest," he says. "Of course, if we had a 26 [order], it would allow us to spend more time unveiling our characters' arcs and to get a broader sense of the world. But I have to tell you, they were so great to work with. They'd tell us, 'Let your imagination go wilder ... go wild, we'll pull you back!' It's so refreshing to hear that, especially after you've worked on several children's shows before!"

Samantha Sings!

Cattrall fans will be delirious when they discover that she'll also be displaying her singing talents on the show. "When we were courting her for the first episode, I could hear her doing a throat exercise," explains Gillis. "I noticed that she has great pitch, so I asked her if she'd be interested in doing a song for the show, and she agreed. The show's musical approach is quite different. It's sophisticated, a combination of Broadway musical mixed with jazz and salsa—you can say it's exotically erotic!"

Young women who tune in may also be struck by the toon's color palette and wonderful contemporary design. According to Gillis, the art department looked into the kinds of colors and artistic styles that appealed to the target demographic. "We did a lot of research looking at everything—online dating sites, magazines, furniture, book covers. We wanted the show to look very cosmopolitan—very New York, but with warm-looking skies. There's always something happening. One thing I came to

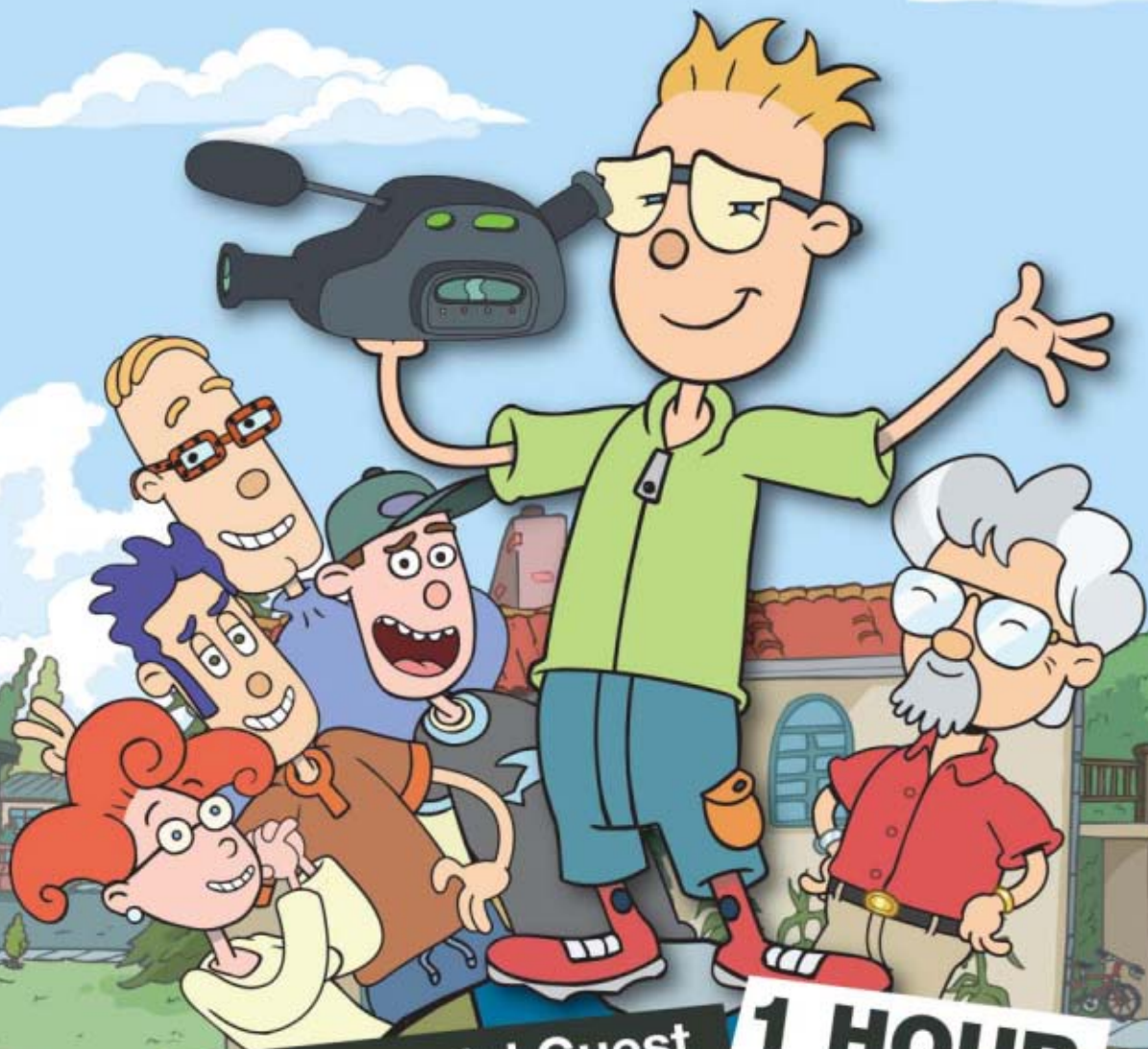
booth to have a fuss-free blast, recording scenes that bring Dee to life," declares Cattrall. "It's bliss!"

As exec producer and co-creator of the show, Gillis is also glowing about another fringe benefit of *Producing Parker*—sitting in a room full of women writers all day! "I know more secrets about the female psyche than I ever thought I could," he says. "At the end of the day, I go home and tell my wife these things, and she can't believe the stuff we discuss. I think guys are going to really enjoy watching the show with their wives and girlfriends. Nothing is sacred—we tell it and we make fun of it all! I think it's going to catch audiences unaware and they're going to engage with it very personally. They'll see themselves reflected in the characters and, hopefully, have fun laughing at themselves!" ■

Producing Parker is scheduled to premiere on Canwest's E! Channel (Canada) in January 2009.

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Gentle Gems

Mig Said..., a poetic new shorts series from Gamania, adds a Zen touch to classic fables. **by Ramin Zahed**

It's not every day that we see a collection of poetic, painterly shorts arriving on the market. Usually, the shorts that make it to the small screen are of the super-hyper *Itchy and Scratchy* variety. That's why it's a kick to see *Mig Said*, a wonderful 44-episode series of one- and two-minute shorts created by Taiwan's Gamania Studio, arriving on the market this fall.

Created by Gamania's in-house development group, Gamania Creative Center, the preschool show is the brainchild of acclaimed Taiwanese illustrator Mig Jou. His goal was to create a series of moral fairy tales with unique twists. For instance, in Mig's interpretation of Aesop's fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare* (titled *The New Race of Turtle and the Hare*), the rabbit helps the turtle finish the race with him and the two

enjoy the sunset together under a tree.

"Gamania Digital Entertainment is



the largest Asian publisher of massive multi-player online games outside of Korea," says Rita Street, president of Radar Cartoons, which acts as Gamania's producer's rep. "The founder of the company, Albert Liu, is a game

creator and creative thinker. He put together his own development group within the company to come up with new concepts for various media."

One of these concepts was originally a game idea which became *Hero: 108*, a comedy-action series in production from Gamania Creative, Mike Young Productions and Cartoon Network Europe. *Mig Said* is obviously quite different in tone, style and content.

"The Flash-animated series has a few recurring characters—such as Oscar the wolf—but for the most part, each episode is wholly unique with a gorgeous painterly look and completely new music," notes Street. "Everyone who sees these little treasures—whether young or old—seems to fall in love with them. They are like little lullaby poems—little pieces of art that make you feel better about the world."

European animation studio Millimages (*Skyland*, 64 Zoo Lane, *Louie*), which has its distribution arm in London, has picked up the series for global sales and will be launching the series at MIP-COM this month. "Look for beautiful *Mig Said* maquettes and giveaways at the Millimages booth," advises Street. The shorts currently air on Nick Jr. U.K., accompanied by narration from everyone's favorite pirate spirit Bill Nighy (*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*). *Mig Said* also airs on Cartoon Network Japan, without Nighy's narration.

According to Street, Millimages originally believed it might be hard to place these shorts, but buyers have shown great interest and surpassed initial expectations. "The very reason that Millimages ultimately picked up the shorts—they simply couldn't resist them—is why buyers are jumping onboard to make a deal for the shorts," she adds. "Because shorts are difficult to program, they have to be truly exceptional, something a channel just can't live without." We also hope we won't have to live without *Mig Said* in the U.S. much longer! ■

For more info, visit www.millimages.com.



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HBO's Big Laughs for the Small Screen

The Life and Times of Tim offers a new grown-up toon for those who are older than rug-rats, but are not quite family guys! **by Mercedes Milligan**

In our industry, one often hears animation artists lamenting toons created by (gasp) non-animators. In the past few years, we've seen a renewed focus on buzzwords like "artist-driven" and the less determined "artist-friendly"—but as HBO's new late-night comedy series *The Life & Times of Tim* proves with its auteurist sensibilities, sometimes, a lot of funny and very little pretty can make productive bedfellows.

Created, written and exec produced by Steve Dildarian (who also voices the titular character), *The Life & Times of Tim* may seem familiar to indie animation fans. That's

a bum, you can't help but root for him.

"I haven't seen a good animated comedy where the storylines are relevant to young people's lives," explains Dildarian, "All the best animated shows seem to center around families, or over-the-top situations. I just wanted to create a show that's more grounded in reality." (Yes, living in Manhattan is that much different from your life!) This down-to-Earth mentality applies seamlessly to the look of the show. Dildarian describes his process—or lack thereof:

"I just draw the characters and background to the best of my ability, and this is what it looks like. I couldn't have drawn it

on our staff to un-learn a lot of what they know how to do," Dildarian says, "We're asking people to draw like a five-year-old, or to animate like a very inexperienced animator. It's easier said than done."

The comic, who lists sardonic maestros Larry David and Ricky Gervais as inspirations, joins the animation scene after a highly successful career in the ad business. After winning a few dozen Clio awards and writing memorable campaigns like the "Budweiser Lizards," he decided to step down from that hectic world and focus on more personal projects. But his three-year journey to TV echoed the hard-luck frustrations of his protagonist.

"I spent a year making the original short films [*Hooker* was followed by three more which comprised the pilot] and writing a pilot script, then another year producing it as a pilot for Fox," Dildarian elaborates. After a couple of false starts at Fox, the pilot was shopped around, attracting funding from Media Rights Capital (which is also on-board Mike Judge's upcoming *The Goode Family*) and eventually landing at HBO—which, happily for their audience, snapped it up the very next day after Dildarian went in for the pitch meeting. "A lot of the groundwork had been done [at that point]," says Dildarian, "The pitch was really just so they could hear my vision for the show, but I have a feeling they knew they liked it before I walked in the room."

A year later, Dildarian has 10 half-hour episodes under his belt. Each episode is, in a way, a self-contained short film, leaving the hapless Tim open to limitless possible fiascos, without any long-term consequences. And much as the short-subject formatting of the series stays true to its origins, so does the wonky animation; "The on-air version is certainly better looking than the first short we did, but the overall style has remained the same."

Though at first glance the static, limitedness of *Tim* makes it seem an unworthy fit for animation, the unpolished quality gives the show an underlying sense of "Gosh darn it, I'm trying!" which perfectly echoes the struggles of our underdog hero. After all, the mark of a true artist is knowing when enough ... is enough. ■

HBO airs *The Life & Times of Tim* Sundays at 11 p.m. For more info, visit www.hbo.com/tim.



because the show was spawned from Dildarian's award-winning *Angry Unpaid Hooker* short, which was featured in the fourth edition of *The Animation Show*. The series follows the comic-tragic misadventures of a 20something New Yorker, who can't catch a break from the bizarre events and characters that turn his every day into a hilarious ordeal, and ruin his attempts to appear normal for the sake of his exasperated girlfriend (voiced by Dildarian's friend and former colleague, Mary Jane Otto). Whether he's being menaced by a pimp or coerced into pressing rape charges against

better if I wanted to," he says, adding, "People seemed to like the unpolished look of the show and the limited animation. I always assumed we'd need to spruce it up somewhere along the way, but we never did."

Dildarian developed this look when he made *Hooker*, after a limited budget lead him to take his live-action plot and turn it into a crash course in animation using Apple's iMovie. Ironically, the "naïve charm" of the stilted animation (art created in Photoshop and animated with After Effects and Final Cut Pro) proved to be the biggest production challenge. "[We had to] teach people

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Mouse House Says Goodbye to Toon Disney

Disney XD eyes the boys' action market.

by Ryan Ball

The phenomenal success of live-action programs such as Disney Channel's *Hannah Montana*, *High School Musical*, *Camp Rock* and *iCarly* is changing the cable television landscape by inspiring diversification in channels that were once solely dedicated to animation. First Cartoon Network began airing *Out of Jimmy's Head*, then snagged its highest ratings ever with the live-action movie *Ben 10: Race Against Time*. Now Disney is re-branding its Toon Disney and Jetix television and online platforms in the U.S. as Disney XD. Debuting in February of 2009 across television, web, mobile and VOD platforms, the 24-hour, advertiser-supported network will feature a mix of live-action and animated programming for kids six to 14.

Whereas Disney Channel's live-action programming is largely targeted to girls, Disney XD's new offerings will be aimed squarely at boys. In addition to action-adventure and comedy series and movies, the network will offer sports-themed shows developed with ESPN. These will include original productions and newly packaged X Games content.

"Disney Channel is a huge business serving kids all around the world, and it's especially successful with girls, and our goal with Disney XD is to have that same success ratio with boys," says Rich Ross, president of Disney Channels Worldwide. "Disney XD will showcase great stories and empowering characters with Disney's brand credibility and a cool creative factor that will set it apart from the pack."

The new live-action programs will include *Aaron Stone*, an original, single camera adventure series about a teenager who is enlisted to become the real-life version of a legendary, crime fighting online game character. The series is exec produced by Bruce Kalish (Disney Channel's *The Famous Jett Jackson*) and Suzanne French (*Overruled!*, *Life with Derek*), and produced in HD by Shaftesbury Films, Inc.

Mongoose & Luther (working title) is a documentary-style single camera show about two best friends who set their sights on becoming world famous skateboarders. The creators and exec producers are Matt Dearborn and Tom Burkhard (both of Disney Channel's *Even Stevens*). Filmed in HD, the series is a production of Turtle Rock Prods., Inc.

Toon fans may be less than thrilled with the re-branding, but animation will still have a strong presence on the network. New ani-



The New Boys' Club: Set to launch in February, Disney XD will feature familiar titles such as *Phineas and Ferb* and *Batman: The Animated Series* and new titles such as Toei Animation's *RoboDz*.

mated properties include the short-form series *Hero and Not* (working title), produced in Italy by Studio Bozzetto & Co. SRL, and *RoboDz*, a CG-animated and live-action short form comedy series co-produced by Toei Animation Company Ltd. and Walt Disney Television International Japan. Other featured series will include the Disney Channel hit animated comedy *Phineas and Ferb*, and the superhero cartoons *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Superman: The Animated Series*, *Spider-Man* and *Iron Man*.

Disney XD, the seventh brand in the kid-driven TV and radio business of The Walt Disney Co., will reach nearly 70 million U.S. households via its basic cable affiliates. The fate of the 19 Jetix channels and six Toon Disney channels



Disney XD



and programming blocks in all other parts of the world will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The House of Mouse is hoping Disney XD will eventually reach the same heights as sibling network Disney Channel. *Hannah Montana*, *High School Musical* and other live-action hits such as *The Wizards of Waverly Place* and *The Cheetah Girls* propelled the outlet to the very top of the cable ratings chart in 2007, drawing an average of 2.69 million total viewers. That's the biggest total audience for any cable network on record. ■



Oscar image courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences

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(Note: In conjunction with this announcement, we will hold at the printer for nomination ads.)

Call 818-991-2884 Ext. 104 or sales@animationmagazine.net

The Padded Cel

by Robby London



A Merger Preparedness Primer: Seven Things You Can Do to Be Ready

It could happen at any time; in a booming economy or its current antithesis—which apparently is called a “fundamentally sound” economy. It can happen as suddenly as ... a moose-hunting former small town mayor becoming president of the U.S. Or a story editor being capriciously fired by a network. Or receiving your first AARP solicitation in the mail. Or falling into a coma induced by lame metaphors.

Yes, the company for which you work could be suddenly ... acquired! And your job eliminated. And since there is absolutely nothing you can do to prevent it, the only thing you can do is be prepared. That is our mission this month: to prepare you. And we shall be vigilant in not allowing this vital mission to be compromised by the cheap temptation to entertain you—oh no, that would be too easy!

Here, then, are seven steps to becoming prepared for that sudden, unexpected announcement on a carefree summer's day:

Save: There are many things you'd be wise to save. First, of course, is money. But also save copies of your best work (or anyone's best work that you can pass off as your own). Save your vacation days so you're maxed out at any given time—that's why god invented sick days and downloadable doctor's notes. Save all the office supplies you can “liberate.” And save your integrity for when you can't find another job in the animation industry and end up becoming a teacher.

Cynical: Sadly, it always pays to be cynical. Let's start with the word “merger.” Ever notice the similarity to

the word “murder?” “Merger” implies a happy marriage but the truth is there will always be a perp ... and a corpse. And you may not grasp which one you are until you happen to be enjoying a “sick day” at the beach and notice a tag on your toe!

Reconnoiter: Ignorance may be bliss, but knowledge is power. Keep your ears to the ground at work. Scour your

goal is to find ways to differentiate your special talents from those of anyone similar in the new parent company. To give one wholly random example, they probably already have a creative executive who is overpaid to underperform.

Waive: If the conquerors are generous enough to offer a severance package, be prepared to waive all rights in order to get it, including such things as the right to sell sushi on eBay, the right to reproduce and the right to be lactose intolerant. And if you work in an “at will” state like California, be prepared to see your at-will-ass “waived” goodbye ... with nothing.

Energy: Energy is a scarce resource. And in a brutal job market, you will need every drop of it to sabotage and assassinate your former trusted colleagues who were laid off too and are competing for the same jobs you are. So, whatever you do, do NOT waste an iota of your precious energy on doing a good job now!

Despair: Okay, let's face it. There is little you can do to protect yourself from the dark side of capitalism which results in the few getting richer and the many getting fired. Our list may be worthless—but at least credit us with respecting our pledge not to entertain you.

Still, we would be remiss not to point out the handy acronym to help you remember these precious seven steps. All you really need remember about mergers is this: be prepared at all times to be **S.C.R.E.W.E.D!** ■

Robby London is an Emmy-winning writer and exec producer. His numerous TV credits include *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Sabrina: the Animated Series*, *Madeline* and *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century*.

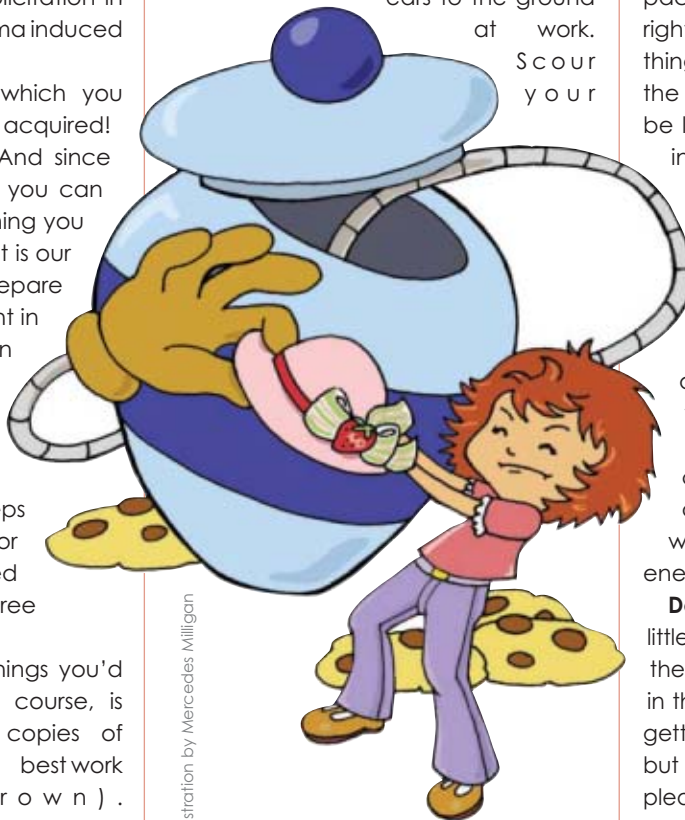


Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

I.T. person's desk for a list of executive passwords to see what's really going on. Use those sick days to make field trips to the marina to see if your CEO just bought a new yacht. Eavesdrop in the executive suite, using that surefire Scooby-Doo trick of disguising yourself as a potted plant.

Educate: As soon as a merger is announced, educate your new bosses about exactly what it is you do. Your

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Fresh Riviera Wrap: 2008 Edition

News and views about the MIPCOM audiovisual content market, held Oct. 13-17, in Cannes, France.

Of Teeny Vikings and Evil Gopherlords

We recently had a chance to sit down and chat with one of our favorite guys in the TV animation business, **Frank Saperstein**, senior VP of animation and children's programming at **Blueprint Media**. It looks like he has a lot of really interesting projects for 2009. In addition to his Flash-animated adult series **Dating Guy** (co-produced with the team at marbledmedia), which we covered in our last TV market issue, he told us about two very eccentric toons which sound like a lot of fun!

The first one is called **Kid Chipmunk**, which is created by Stephen Holman and Josephine Huang (*Kablam!*). "It's a wild, game-inspired adventure series about four young kids named Kid Chipmunk, Pigeon Girl, Beaver Boy and Raccoon Suzie," says Saperstein, with a big smile on his face. "They were kidnapped right after birth, raised by animals in the wild and have become vigilant superheroes who battle the evil Gopherlord and his mutant army in all kinds of environmental battles!" (Frank, you had us at the Kid Chipmunk alone!)



Kid Chipmunk

Also on the Blueprint plate is **Eric the Tiny**, created by Russell Marcus (*Brandy & Mr. Whiskers*, *Married with Children*). This one is about—wait for it, wait for it—the world's smallest, meanest, most righteous Viking. "Every day he has to go fight and pillage, but he also has a totally dysfunctional family—one gay son, one really dumb son and a promiscuous daughter and wife who's the village medic!" explains Saperstein. Or as the show's official description synopsis reads, "His family parallels our world today ... if we bowled with human heads, used teeth as currency and chained our mentally challenged relatives in the basement." Nuf said!

One More Reason to Love Italia!

Next time you're in Italy, forget about those overrated tourist attractions such as Rome's Leaning Tower of Pisa, Florence's Uffizi Gallery and Venice's Bridge of Sighs. The creative team at Italy's animation studio **Gruppo Alcini** have taken a page out of the Disney book and opened the doors to **The Talking Tree Park**, a new family attraction in the beautiful city of Treviso.



"Set in a historic location, the park is a spacious green destination which inspires fun, learning and interactive experiences," says Laura Gambino, Gruppo Alcini's head of sales. "We believe the park is truly unique in both Italy and Europe."

Upon entering the park, young visitors can find their way to an ancient *cedraia* (a citrus tree greenhouse). Their fantastic voyage will lead them to a place where they can witness the birth of cinema, learn about the process of animation and discover how new technologies allow live-action actors to interact with animated characters from Gruppo Alcini's favorite shows such as *Pet Pals* and *Leonardo*.



"The Talking Tree Park is the ideal location for school excursions or for family outings," says Gambino. After all, how many times will you get the chance to hang out with the Pet Pal characters in real life—fantastico, no?

Around the World With Unusual Designs

Almost 135 years ago, French fantasy master Jules Verne wrote the exciting adventure *Around the World in 80 Days*. Since then, numerous adaptations of the work have been produced for cinema and TV. David Niven and Pierce Brosnan have both played the Englishman hero Phileas Fogg and Jackie Chan and Eric Idle have starred as his valet Passepartout in different productions.

We recently got word that Toronto-based **Comet Entertainment** (*Santa Vs. Claus*, *Wrappy: Sex Police*) has signed a deal with Spanish studio **Somuga**—which has a big licensing and merchandising arm in San Sebastian—to produce a new 80-minute Flash-animated movie inspired by the classic.

"This will be a completely exciting new adventure, perfect for the 21st century with a really unique look and fantastic characters," says Comet Entertainment's CEO Raquel Benitez. "**Around the World in 80 Days, Free!** centers on the famous bet between two friends [they're renamed Sheepskin and Kebab in this version] over whether it's possible for Sheepskin to travel around the world for free. What happens is that the cities Phileas Fogg passed through about 200 years ago are now emblematic centers, full of different obstacles!" And yes, the secret child of the late Lady Diana and Dodi Al-Fayed plays a part in this scenario!

We have a feeling we'll be following these new eccentric-looking characters to the far corners of the world. You can check out the designs and some of Somuga's t-shirt and toy designs at www.somuga.com and learn more at www.cometentertainment.com.



Animasia Serves Alphabet Soup and Soccer Fever

Kuala Lumpur-based animation studio **Animasia** is bringing two very different shows to the MIPCOM market this month. The first one is a colorful preschool series about the 26 letters of the alphabet who live within the walls of Capital Castle! The 26 x 22 show is called **ABC Monsters** and is produced at Animasia's studio using Flash software in High



Def. The colorful toon was the winner of Malaysia's I.P. Challenge, which was organized by the country's Multimedia Development Corporation.

Animasia's managing director and the show's exec producer Edmund Chan tells us that the show targets four- to six-year-olds in English-speaking territories, but skews a bit older for non-English regions. "The concept is fresh and creative as we face these 26 letters in

our daily life," says Chan. He says the show is currently in production, and Animasia has secured interest from Malaysian, Middle Eastern and European TV networks.

With eyes on the sport's huge fan base all around the world, Animasia is also bringing a 13-part soccer-themed toon to the market. **Supa Strikas** is another HD, Flash-animated series which is centered on the world's greatest players, united in the spirit of adventure. "The story's magic lies in the variety of content, character and locale ... and of course, in the blazing action both on and off the field," says Oliver Power, exec producer of Strika Entertainment. He also notes that the show is based on a popular *Supa Strikas* multi-platform project which includes several print formats, website and animated shorts for broadcast TV. "Our target audience is boys, seven to 11, but we expect people of all ages to enjoy this universal action-adventure series."

Fans can expect to start screaming "Gooooooooaaaaa!" as early as November, when the show hits leading TV stations across Asia, Latin America and Malaysia.

Chan says the growth of new media has helped producers in the region maximize their revenue potential. "The Asian market itself is an interesting area where countries such as China, India and Indonesia are becoming more mature with higher purchasing power and give us more opportunities to push for merchandise volumes," says the producer. "Besides Malaysia will also be a new destination for high quality animation productions as we have strong training institutions and universities delivering quality talent every year. Year in and year out, we have a strong, knowledgeable work force which can support the continuous flow of projects from abroad."



To learn more about these and the studio's other projects, visit www.animasia-studio.com.

Mouse's Tale Captures Cartoon D'Or

Those talented French animation students have done it again. **Benjamin Renner**, a graduate of France's *La Poudrière*, received Cartoon Forum's Cartoon d'Or Award for his graduation project, **A Mouse's Tale** (*La Queue de la Souris*) last month.

Renner's four-minute short uses drawings and cut-out animation to tell the story of a lion who captures a mouse and is about to devour it when the mouse proposes a deal. Renner made the film while he was attending La Poudrière, an animation film-directing school in France, where he directed several shorts. The 24-year-old is now working at France's Les Armateurs studio, where he is lead animator on the upcoming movie *Ernest and Celestine*.

The Cartoon d'Or 2008 jury was composed of directors Enzo D'Alo from Italy, Raul Garcia from Spain and Michael Coldewey from Germany. Cartoon d'Or is part of the annual Cartoon Forum event, which was held at Ludwigsburg in September. For further information, visit www.cartoon-media.eu.



This Cat Is Ready for His Comeback!

Now that Garfield the cat has two CG-animated movies under his fat belt, it's time for his charming rival from the '80s to step into the limelight. Created by George



Gately in 1973, the black-and-orange cat **Heathcliff** has been a popular staple of the funny pages in newspapers around

the world. In addition, he starred in two different TV series (produced by Ruby-Spears Productions and DIC) and had the distinct honor of being voiced by the legendary Mel Blanc.

Last month, **FitzRoy Media** CEO Hamp Hampton announced that his company has teamed up with Gately's nephew **Peter Gallagher**, who now writes and draws the comic strip, to develop new animated projects based on the popular feline. Los Angeles-based studio Renegade Animation is also involved in the project.

"We want to emphasize that Heathcliff is the original streetwise cat," says Gallagher, in a phone interview. "We want to update him, so that a whole new audience will be introduced to him. It's funny how people sometimes confuse him with Garfield, but there is a difference—Heathcliff actually came out first, several years before Garfield."

Gallagher, who took over the strip after the passing of this uncle, says Heathcliff is a great character to write about. "He has a girlfriend, and he always gets into trouble with her. Throughout the years, the strip's humor and personality have remained constant."

Gallagher says he still enjoys creating the strip the old fashioned way. "Very little is done on the computer," says the artist, who works from his home in Glenridge, New Jersey. "Coming up with ideas day after day is the toughest part of the job. It never gets easier. But I have to tell you, I've always loved to draw. I remember how I missed a couple of days drawing when I was a kid, and I almost developed an allergic reaction!" Now that sounds like a perfect plot for a *Heathcliff* episode!

FatKat Unleashes Kooky Crime-Fighters

Bewildered attendees of the Ottawa Animation Festival's opening night screening got a sneak peek at **FatKat Animation** studio's offbeat new series **SpaceKnights**. Actors dressed up as the toon's goofy crime-fighting characters got a few laughs when they interrupted festival director Chris Robinson's introductory speech. Based in New Brunswick, Canada, FatKat is gearing up heavily for the new Flash-animated toon, which is an off-the-wall parody of programs such as *Voltron*, *Transformers* and *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.



Gene Fowler

"The SpaceKnights are a group of slightly outdated superheroes who drive 1994 Honda Accords that have been given special abilities," says company president Gene Fowler, who co-created the show with Buddy Bolton (*My Adventures with Cloe*). "When they're together, they can transform into a variety of giant robots, from a pterodactyl, to a giant T-Rex, to a Saber Tooth Tiger."

According to the always-energetic Mr. Fowler, about 120 employees are working at the studio on the project, which is one of Teletoon's Detour Pilot Projects. "I think fans of those old shows are going to get a kick out of the toon, which is going to answer pressing questions like 'Where do you get funding for giant robots?' and 'Why



does it seem like every alien travels billions of light years across the depth of space, all the way to Earth, only to want a fist fight!?"

FatKat, which also works on Animation Collective's Nicktoons series *Three Delivery*, will be taking *SpaceKnights* to MIPCOM, so watch out for four

wild and crazy guys in funny costumes on the Riviera this month. (Although it might be hard to tell them apart from all the other slightly insane market attendees!)

For more info about this fun toon studio, visit <http://fatkat.ca>.

Yummy and ZeFronk Land on OddBot's Menu

It's been a very busy summer for the talented group of animators, artists and producers at Los Angeles-based studio **OddBot**. They wrote to tell us that they've been working on a new animated interstitial series for Playhouse Disney, called **Tasty Time with ZeFronk**. Slated for a November debut on the cabler, the show is about a French wiener dog who hosts a cooking show with his assistant, a bird named Sue. The appetizing toon offers kids and their parents/caregivers great recipes for healthy treats that they can make at home. "ZeFronk encourages kids to be actively involved with creating healthy meals in the kitchen," says OddBot president and creative director Chris Hamilton. "The unique style of the show is a mixture of Flash animation with actual pictures of the ingredients. After we prepared and photographed the food at the studio, we had to sample the final dishes--no sense in wasting food! I have to say, everything tasted great!"

OddBot is also working on American Greetings and DQ Entertainment's **Maryoku Yummy**, the 52 x 11-minute preschool show about a magical creature that tries very hard to make children's wishes come true. "It was such a pleasure working with show's creator Jeffrey Conrad and his team at American Greetings," adds Hamilton.

"They are so creative, highly supportive, and reacted positively to our ideas. This made building the whimsical, unique, and colorful world of *Maryoku Yummy* inspiring. Plus the characters look like cute little marshmallows with dot eyes - and who doesn't like marshmallows?"

To learn more about OddBot's wide variety of animation production services and its feature, broadcast, cable and web projects, visit www.oddbot.net.

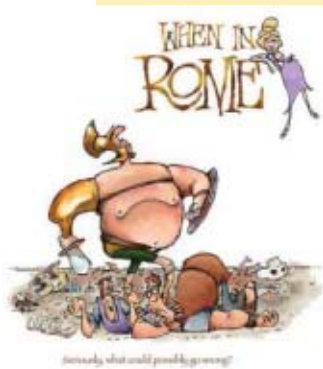


Lincoln Butterfield Offers Fantastic Foursome

Robert Hughes and his maddeningly creative team at the new indie toon studio **Lincoln Butterfield Animation** have lined up quite a lineup for the market this year. Hughes (an animation director on *Phineas & Ferb* and *Angry Beavers*) has joined forces with Porchlight Entertainment to deliver **Tan**, an action comedy about a group of egg friends (Tan, Foo Young, Tamago and Curry) that have recently graduated from the Lo Fat Martial Arts Academy and Cooking School and face many adventures and challenges without letting go of their eggscellent optimism.

Also part of the new Butterfield catalog is *NIT: The Neighborhood Investigation Team*, a show created by Hughes and designed by Mitch Schauer; and an adult toon called *Venture Probe*, about the voyages of Captain Craig Taylor and his incompetent crew aboard a corporate-class sales cruiser. Wrapping up the studio's offerings is a curious number called **When in Rome**, which is said to be inspired by

the two acclaimed *I, Claudius* novels by Robert Graves. The show follows two helpless cousins who weave in and out of the treacherous Roman Empire. Created and written by Robert Hughes and designed by Frank Furlong, the property is available both as a comic book and animated series. May the sweetness, insanity and decadence bring Butterfield much success!



FatCat Swims in the CrocPond

It's been almost eight years since **FatCat Animation Studio** (not to be confused with FatKat Studio in



Rindin the Puffer

Canada) opened its doors in Tempe, Arizona. By keeping the flames of traditional animation alive, the studio is carving a niche in the competitive toon market. "We currently have a number of projects in the works which

include family programming from our *Gathering Place* series, **CrocPond Short Films** and a joint project with California's Beati Productions to develop and produce children's interstitials for Max on Snax, which promotes healthy eating habits for children," says Len Simon, the studio's co-founder and animation director.

FatCat, which began life as a spin-off of the old Fox studio in Arizona and is now a subsidiary of San Francisco-based Crocodiles not Waterlilies Entertainment, is producing 30 short films based on CrocPond's stories and kid-friendly characters and universe. "One of the award-winning shorts (*Rindin the Puffer*) is being screened at film festivals worldwide

and gaining attention from audiences and the entertainment industry.

We're also producing *Dex's Gym* and *Babysitting Bolper*. This awareness is building momentum on our main focus, which is the **CrocPond** feature film."



Simon says the studio, which currently has a staff of just under 50, takes great pride in being one of the few U.S.

animation studios which is still following the 2D route, "Our animators keep true to the traditional art form; still animating the way it was done over 50 years ago—drawing with pencil on paper. However, we also understand the need to evolve, and in doing so we utilize today's digital technologies such as Toon Boom's UAnimation, Photoshop, 3ds Max, After Effects and Final Cut Pro HD, among others."

Simons says he believes that there are still a lot of animation fans who prefer 2D to CG. "Based on recent reports, over 51 percent of animators would like to work on 2D classic animated films," he adds. "These types of figures speak volumes and reaffirm that we are headed in the right direction. We simply focus on the strength of our people, their storytelling skills and their creativity."

To learn more, go to www.fatcatanimation.com and www.crocpond.com.

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Chloé van den Berg

Entertainment Rights Plc Executive Director, International

Years in the biz: Coming up on 20 years

Hometown: London

Favorite animated show of 2008: Soon to be launched brand new *Postman Pat* SDS, followed closely by Pixar's *WALL•E*.

Recently acquired titles: *Sheldon*®, CGI-animated (26 x 30) series produced by Shellhut Entertainment.

Things I look for in a show: Today a show has to work across multiple platforms and needs to stand out from the crowd, but what remains essential is the story and characters have to be strong and engage with the audience.

My dream vacation: Havelock, Beach No.7, The Andaman Islands.

The book that changed my life: *The Lonely Planet*.

Favorite performer: Currently, Jack Johnson.

Shows I always TiVo: *The Gadget Show*, *Heroes*, *Gray's Anatomy*, *The Tonight Show*.

The gizmo I can't live without: Sad to say, the BlackBerry.

What I love about my job: The people, the content and that it's an environment that is constantly evolving.

The most annoying trend of the year: Blaming all of the world's ills on the credit crunch—most definitely over used?!?

Do you have any unusual hobbies/talents:

Nothing that I'm willing to put in print...



Sheldon

Cartoon Forum's Top 10 Toons:

The following shows registered the most attendance at last month's Cartoon Forum in Germany:

1. Mouk's World Tour (Millimages)
2. Pok & Mok (Alphanim/Vivement Lundi!)
3. Mr. Baby (Xilam Animation)
4. Plankton Invasion (Tinkertee/Nexus Factory/TeamTO)
5. Badly Drawn Roy (Jam Media)
6. Gaston (Normaal Animation)
7. Dr. Brumm (TRIKK 17 Animationsraum GmbH)
8. The Three Robbers (Animation-X, Les Armateurs)
9. Claude (Folimage)
10. Huhu (Studio Baestarts)

Source: Cartoon Forum press office

Richard Rowe

Turner Broadcasting Acquisitions Executive

Years in the biz: 7

Hometown: London

Favorite animated show of 2008: Whilst *South Park* continues to be produced; it will always be my favorite.

Recently acquired titles: *Hi-5 UK*, *Pink Panther*, *The Garfield Show*, *Blue Water High* Season 2 and *The Latest Buzz* Season 3.

Things I look for in a show: It does depend what channel I am buying for, but generally speaking: Endearing characters and the ability to provoke emotion ... usually a smile!

What I hate to see in a show: The cutting of corners.

My dream vacation: Living with bears in Alaska.

The movie that changed my life: *Super Size Me*. This piece of gastro art not only showed how possible it is to live solely on McDonalds, but also if you eat under nine Big Mac meals a day it isn't that bad for you, either.

Favorite performer: Larry David in *The Producers*.

Shows I always TiVo: *Match of the Day*, *Dragons Den*, *Peep Show*, *Soccer AM*, *Panorama*.

The gizmos I can't live without: Xbox 360, PS3, Tom Tom.

What I love about my job: There aren't many jobs that beat getting paid to watch TV.

The most annoying trend of the year: Converse trainers and skintight jeans.

Do you have any unusual hobbies/talents?: This isn't the place to list them!



The Garfield Show

Total Drama, The Musical?

Canada's TELETOON has ordered more episodes of **Fresh TV's** animated series **Total Drama Island** and **Stoked**. The third season of the mock reality show *Drama* takes a musical spin as *Total Drama, the Musical* plays on such popular live-action tween sensations as *High School Musical* and *Camp Rock*. The network commissioned another 26 episodes of the upcoming *Stoked*, an animated sitcom about teens who come together one summer to work at Surfer's Paradise Resort, bringing the total order to 52 installments. The show will premiere on TELETOON in the spring of 2009.



Created by Fresh TV partners Tom McGillis and Jennifer Pertsch, *Total Drama, the Musical* takes 15 lucky contestants all over the globe to compete in challenges and break into spontaneous musical numbers in each episode. TELETOON has also committed to a new season, dubbed *Total Drama Action*, which is distributed

internationally by Cake Entertainment (*King Arthur's Disasters*, *Skunk Fu!*) It definitely sounds like the Toronto-based family entertainment outfit has carved a really nice niche in the market for itself. Check out www.freshtvinc.com for more info.

Nerd Corps Roots for Evil

A wise man once said, "I have discovered that all human evil comes from this, man's being unable to sit still in a room." When it comes to Vancouver-based **Nerd Corps'** latest animated show, **League of Super Evil** (yup, that's L.O.S.E.!) it's all about taking over the world!

The 26 X half-hour series is quickly gaining momentum in Latin America, where it will launch on Jetix, and in France, where it will premiere on Canal +, Canal J and Gulli in 2009. The series charts the adventures of four goofy supervillains (Great Voltar, Doktor Frogg, Reginald "Red" Menace and Doomageddon!) who have set their sights on wreaking havoc on their neighborhood. The bad-to-the-bone Nerd team is also working hard on developing a mega fansite where kids can enjoy interactive games, create their own virtual villain identities and watch streaming videos.

"*League of Super Evil* is about a compelling cast of hilarious goofball characters driving these fast-paced, absurd storylines," says Nerd Corps supreme commander and creative mastermind Asaph Fipke. "It has a broad appeal in that the edgier send up of typical super hero/villain stories will resonate with older kids, while its fast-paced, slapstick action and silly humor will keep the younger end tuned in too." He kind of makes us want to throw a cape over our shoulders and start planning nefarious plots against do-gooders! For more info, visit www.thenerdcorps.com.



Mater Gets Own Show on Disney (Sort of!)



Mater, the rusty tow truck which befriended Lightning McQueen in the 2006 Pixar feature *Cars* will star in his own animated three-part short

series. Pixar's **Cars Toons** will premiere on Disney Channel, Toon Disney and ABC Family beginning Monday, Oct. 27. This news follows the recent announcement that director Brad Lewis' *Cars 2* sequel will now be released in the summer of 2011.

These three short animated vignettes are directed by John Lasseter and co-directed by Pixar animators Victor Navone and Rob Gibbs and produced by Kori Rae. Mater, who is voiced by Larry the Cable Guy, rescues McQueen from a burning building, becomes a famous daredevil and tries his hand at bulldozing in this fun trilogy.

Lots of vroom, vroom, vroom ahead!

A Brown Bear Goes Green

These days, even the animated bears are more ecologically conscious than the old classic toons like Yogi Bear. A good example is **Beary Boo**, a new preschool show about a green-living brown bear cub, which will be produced by Ireland's **Caboom** and distributed by L.A.-based **PorchLight Entertainment**. This deal marks the Irish outfit's first distribution deal of an original property in the U.S.

The preschool show follows the adventures Beary who joins the Fuzzy Scouts and marches to the tune of conservation and living green. "We are pleased to be working with the talented team at Caboom on *Beary Boo*," says Fred Schaefer, PorchLight's senior VP of animation. "With *Beary Boo*, Caboom has created an exceptional series that combines great designs, humor and entertaining stories with messages on conservation, recycling, and other eco-conscious themes." You can find out more info about the two companies at www.caboom.ie and www.porchlight.com.



Fishing for a Tasty Hit

Inspidea and SIP show appetite for sushi with *Ko-Bushi*.



So you think you've heard and seen it all when it comes to concepts for animated shows for kids this fall? How about a three-minute format about a shogun, two samurai, three ninjas and a dog made out of tofu, who are trying to outsmart each other to become the mascot of a sushi bar? That's right—bet you don't hear that very often!

The series is called *Ko-Bushi*, a co-production between Malaysian animation studio Inspidea and French toon house SIP. As it turns out, the origins of the idea go back to 2005, when Inspidea entered it in the Singapore Super Pitch event. "The concept and the name of the project were quite different—it was more Zen, mystical and—pardon the pun—raw," says Inspidea's managing director Andrew Ooi. "After *Combo Niños*, we thought it might be a good

idea to work together with SIP Animation again. So we went looking for a project that is suitable for collaboration."

The team at SIP Animation, under the direction of Stephanie Kirchmeyer, liked the original concept for the show and decided to work together with Inspidea. "The project really felt right to both sides, so we went ahead and divided our duties," says Ooi. "SIP Animation refined the concept and the storytelling while we tweaked the design of the characters and the show. The end result is something we can proudly say was co-created."

Ooi points out that the design of the show is "drenched in a heavy dose of *kawaii*." He says everything has that special Japanese "cute flavor," which is universally admired. Another selling point is the fact that it doesn't have

any spoken words, so it appeals to viewers all around the world. The three-minute length of the show also makes it suitable for various formats—from standard broadcast to specialty channels to mobile media downloads. The producers are hoping to wrap the financing in the near future and begin production by early next year and have the show debut in 2010.

Inspidea's managing director confirms that the animation scene in Malaysia is going through a renaissance of late. "There are more companies that are getting their feet wet than before," he says. "This is a good because we are getting some competition, we think. The government is supportive of the local entertainment industry, with friendly policies coupled with several incentives packages and tax breaks."

The team at Inspidea is also working on *X3*, a new spinoff of their popular series *Mustang Mama*. The 26 x two-minute package follows the extreme sports-themed adventures of the spirited grandma, her tough grandson Toby and Sally, her naughty pet cow!

"The challenge for Inspidea is out-



performing ourselves," observes Ooi. "We want to come up with new shows that are better than what we already have in terms of concept, design and storytelling. We also want to improve our animation skills so that the bar is set higher with each new show ... Malaysia is exposed to both Eastern- and Western-style animation. We have been this way for years! Hopefully the future kids will be influenced by Malaysian animation." ■

—Ramin Zahed

For more information on these shows, visit www.inspidea.com.



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Hitting All the Right Intergalactic Notes

The man behind the score of the new *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* series writes about working with Lucas and Filoni to create the show's exotic music.

by Kevin Kiner

After 20 years of scoring television series, you think you've heard it all ... until George Lucas says he'd like to hear a Bulgarian women's choir included in a *Star Wars* score.

Scoring the new *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, which begins its run on Cartoon Network this month, is easily the most difficult and, simultaneously, satisfying project I've ever worked on. We don't approach this as a TV show, but as "mini-movies"—and we've got 44 of them in the first two seasons.

The challenges are two-fold (at least): Creating a score in the grand tradition

of John Williams' standard-setting *Star Wars* music, and matching the expectations of executive producer George Lucas and supervising director Dave Filoni in terms of texture, flavor and sound. The latter part of that equation is where Bulgarians enter the picture.

George decided early on that each episode would be defined by a particular ethnicity of the planet, locale or environment where most of the action takes place. For the viewer, that makes the series fascinating. For the composer, it creates a massive job on a weekly basis.



First, I need to thoroughly explore the music of the ethnic variety for that week's episode, and for one of the episodes, that meant a Bulgarian flavor. George had been quite taken by the sound of a Bulgarian women's choir and felt that was right for this planet. I had little experience with Bulgarian music, so my first task was to learn everything I could and figure out how to incorporate the sound. The end result was a fairly authentic piece of music, complete with the women's choir.

But it didn't stop with Bulgaria. We've used everything from South American charangos to Chilean drums to the Indian bansuri flute to a Japanese shakuhachi, and they all instill wildly different

Harmonic Convergence

textures in the series' unique, new worlds. And each comes with a different bit of inspiration: The choir provided a deep, nasal, haunting sound; the bansuri brought the score a very woody, earthy quality; and the shakuhachi offered an emotional, almost mournful, sound.

about music without actually playing a note. So the temp track is the easiest way for them to give me strong direction, and I use it for tempo and texture, mood and the pacing.

Ahsoka's theme is probably my favorite—that really came straight out of her personality. There's a softness to it. It's not complex in terms of chord structure, and it features melody notes that aren't part of that structure—exotic notes that I think fit her well.

After I've sketched it all out, I orchestrate the score, instrument by instrument. The music in this series is so complex that I usually am able to write about two minutes a day—and that's over a 12-hour day. I work out most of the themes on piano and write them down on paper, then I start orchestrating with samples, one instrument at a time, building a string section, then brass and percussion.

The whole experience is like growing up or giving birth—painful, but extremely rewarding. When you've done it, you have that knowledge, and that never leaves. Now I can write in the style of Bulgaria, it's part of my musical vocabulary, and it can only make me a better composer.

If anyone had ever asked about my aspirations and goals, I would have simply said, "I want to be the next John Williams." His scores are the absolute pinnacle of our craft, and to assume that role, to follow in his footsteps and with this wonderful material is a great honor and very exciting. Now, every morning I get up and get to do what he did. That's very inspiring. ■

Kevin Kiner is a two-time Emmy nominee and the composer for the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* feature film and TV series, as well as *CSI: Miami*, *Star Trek: Enterprise* and *Stargate SG-1*. He was nominated for an Annie Award for his work on *Harold and the Purple Crayon*. While he admits he has attended the midnight premieres of the final five *Star Wars* films, he swears he never donned a costume for the events.



Kevin Kiner

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Marathon Media eyes the boys' action audience with a spunky new 2D show called *The Amazing Spiez!*

Sometimes a hit animated series can lead to a great new spinoff that looks nothing like its predecessor. That scenario is happening this fall as Marathon Media's new boys' action-comedy toon *The Amazing Spiez!* tries to follow in the footsteps (or the high heels) of the French studio's globally successful *Totally Spies!* "We had been thinking about how to expand the *Totally Spies!* brand for a while now and were looking for a smart and different way of doing it," says David Michel, Marathon Media's general manager and co-creator of both shows. "So, we decided to take it to a completely different cartoony level and age group."

Created in HD, the 52 x 26 spy comedy/adventure revolves around the escapades of four 10-year-old siblings (Lee, Megan, Marc and Tony Clark) who use high-tech gadgets and (yes!) top-of-the-line vehicles to battle the forces of evil while dealing with the regular headaches of school and parents' supervision! Like many of Marathon's hit shows, the series has a colorful palette and an edgy graphic style.

"After eight years, *Totally Spies!* is still an international reference in the spy genre," says Marathon Media's president and show co-creator Vincent Chalvon-Demersay. "*The Amazing Spiez!* has a unique, stunning visual look,

mixed with a great deal of comedy." Directed by *Totally Spies!* veteran Stephane Berry, the series is a Marathon Media, Canal J and Image Enter-



tainment co-production, in association with TF1 and Teletoon Canada.

Unlike *Totally Spies!*, which had a very feminine color scheme and was inspired by manga, the new show is heavily influenced by American comic books. As Michel explains, "Our team of designers have used the look of Marvel and DC Comics as a take-off point, but it looks different from other shows we have seen."

Michel describes the animation style as enhanced 2D—shot in High-Def, with heavy compositing and treatment in After Effects. He notes, "We're French! We spend a lot of time looking at the pictures, so you know, it has a

very distinct look!"

The company is also working on a major new media push for the toon. According to Michel, TF1 and Marathon are spending close to \$300,000 per show online. "We have 10 people in house working on the web components of the show," he says. "We have inserted secret codes in each episode that direct viewers to exclusive content online



David Michel

that continues the storyline. We've made the site very interactive. The episodes will be available online and offer completely original material."

One of the top TV animation players in France, Marathon Media will be bringing the new toon to the MIPCOM market, along with some of its other recent new shows including *The Famous Five* and *Monster Buster Club*.

Michel also has some good news for fans of the original *Totally Spies!* series. Those fashionista crime-fighters of Beverly Hills will be stars of their own theatrical

movie, which will be released in Europe in July of 2009. "When that show came out eight years ago, we had nothing to lose," he admits. "It was virgin territory and we had a lot of fun exploring what it was like to be a teenage girl and have this completely other lifestyle. Now we are taking that concept and seeing how our young boys deal with having a secret spy life and dealing with authority figures like their parents and teachers. It's going to be a lot of fun!" ■

—Ramin Zahed

For more info about the series, visit www.marathonmedia.fr.



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Objects of Our Affection

News from the world of toys and merchandising
by Ramin Zahed

Toy Event with a British Accent

It's become an early fall ritual to meet up with the likes of Angelina Ballerina, Miffy, Marge Simpson and Bob the Builder at the annual **Brand Licensing Europe** show in London. Held at the Grand Hall of London's Olympia on Oct. 1 and 2, the event attracts close to 200 exhibitors, from Hollywood studios such as Fox and Warner Bros. to licensing arms of international TV players such as Nickelodeon, TV-Loonland, Aardman and Entertainment Rights. Besides



the usual meet-and-greet opportunities, the show features informative sessions and a screening suite where promos, sizzle reels and trailers can be screened for potential partners. "According to auditors, 4,301 pure visitors attended Brand Licensing

Europe 2007, an increase of eight percent on 2006 and even higher than we had originally thought," says Helen Gardner, managing director of the event's organizer Advanstar Communications. Although the toy business has been in a slump lately, we're hoping that events like Brand Licensing will energize the business in time for the holiday season. After all, nothing tickles Elmo and his toy buddies better than a healthy profit margin.

The New Pig in Town

Fans of quality children's books know Mick Inkpen as the creative author and illustrator of the popular *Kipper the Dog* series. Now his other hit property, **Wibbly Pig**, is making the transition to children's TV as well. A co-production between the U.K.'s Wish Films and Toronto-based 9 Story Entertainment, the new 52 x 10-minute toon has signed BBC Worldwide as international distributor and licensing rep. CBeebies in the U.K. will air the new Wibbly Pig



series in the fall of 2009. Wibbly is a gentle preschool-age pig who is often accompanied by his toys, Pigly, Flop and Dimple. We have a feeling Olivia,

Piggly Winks and Peppa Pig aren't too thrilled about this latest addition to the crowded porcine preschool playground, but we're sure Wibbly will put his own stamp on the tyke toon market.

Smells Like a Great Toy Deal

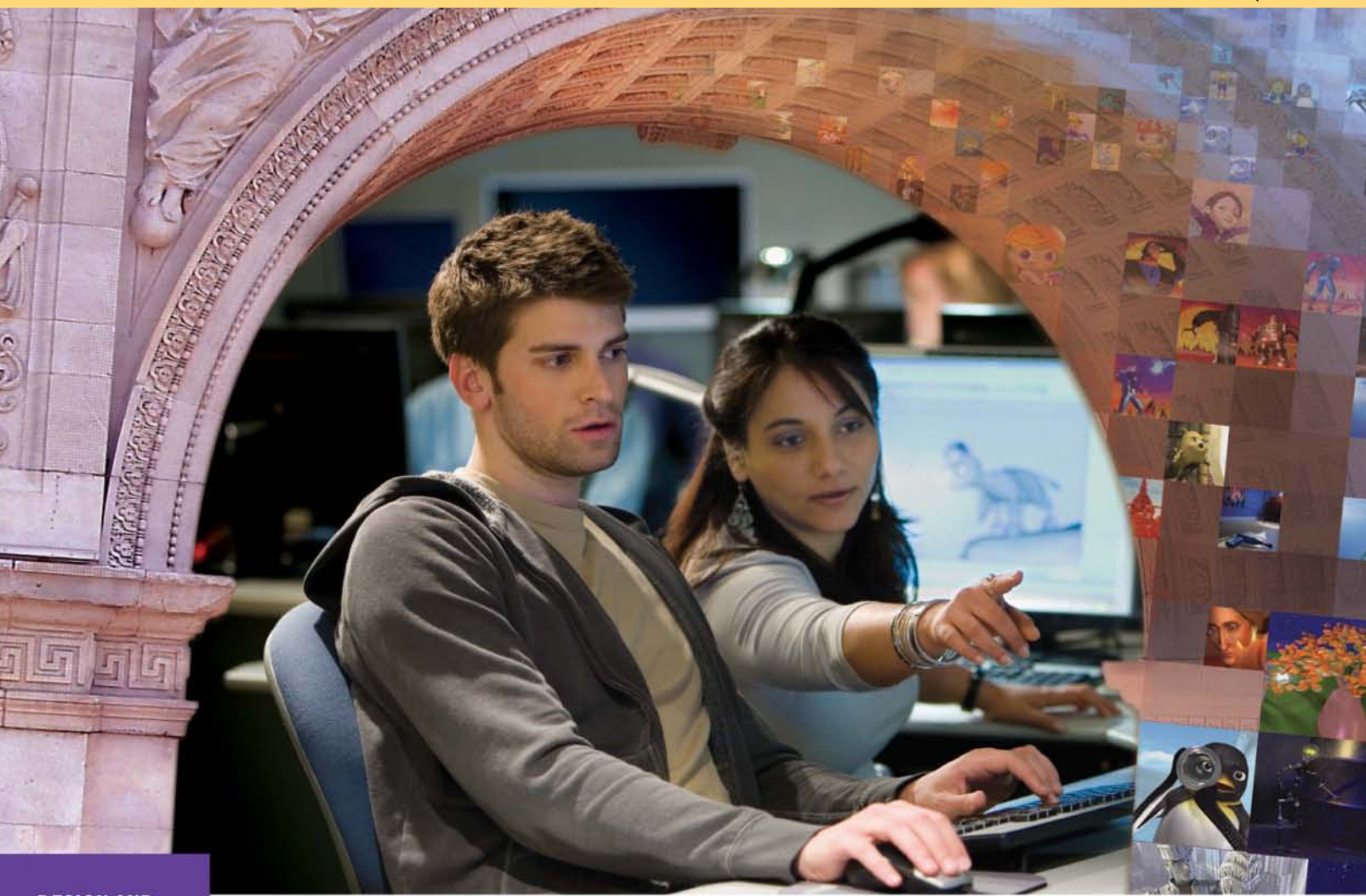
Kids are going to be seeing a lot more of the animated series **Skunk Fu!** in toy stores in the months ahead. Produced by Cartoon Saloon, Cake Entertainment and Telegael, the show's toy rights have been snapped up by Zizzle from Galleon Holdings for the U.S. market. Croco Worldwide—a division of Galleon—will develop a toy line based on the property, which is currently airing on Cartoon Network.



A Heroine with Whiskers

Jennifer and Matthew Holm's **Babymouse** may be one of the few graphic novel characters who is pink, sassy and has whiskers on her face. United Media recently picked up the merchandising rights to the popular gal/mouse who has been winning over the hearts of young readers since 2005. In each one of her Random House books, the adventurous heroine finds herself in unique situations as a skater girl, a rock star, a camp counselor, heartbreaker, etc. In this month's *Monster Mash*, she is determined to have the best Halloween costume and the best ghoulish party EVER! She might even have a brush with the Creature from the Black Lagoon! We can totally see Elle Fanning (that's Dakota's little sister) in the movie version.





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Battles Ahead

Ever since its debut on TV Tokyo last year, the anime series **Bakugan Battle Brawlers** has captured the imagination of a new generation of young boys. Now the toon is slowly taking over the licensing world as well. Broadcast partner Cartoon Network Enterprises has signed new licensing partners for the boys' brand, which means we'll be seeing Bakugan tees, sweatshirts, backpacks, novelty stationery, lunch bags and messenger bags (courtesy of Hybrid Tees, Accessory Innovations and Jazwares). You'll be seeing kids wearing Bakugan swimwear, board shorts and rash guards from B-Life and sleepware from SGI Apparel next spring. We might as well face it—it's going to be a Battle Brawler kind of a world.



More Expansion for the Wallace & Gromit Empire

Since the popularity of the characters created by the talented team at **Aardman Animations** shows no signs of slowing down, the Bristol-based studio has created a new division under the **Aardman Rights** banner. The new division is set up to market and sell Aardman content across all media and it will seek to expand its IP portfolio by representing third-party properties. Overseeing the new division is Sean Clarke who reports directly to Miles Bullough, head of broadcast. "We wanted to create a more efficient and focused sales and marketing division to drive forward the exploitation of our own properties

as well as third party rights across multiple platforms," say Bullough.

In related news, our favorite inventor and his resourceful pooch recently made a smooth transition to the world of *haute couture*. Shot by

Giles Revell, Wallace, Gromit and Lady Tottington show off their new threads in a series of splashy ads for department store group Harvey Nichols. Beckham and Posh were reportedly green with envy.



Top Toys of the Moment

The following new releases were doing well on Amazon's best-seller list this month:

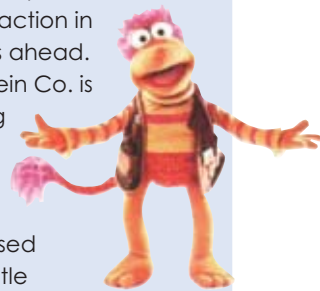
1. Elmo Live (Fisher-Price, \$69.95)
2. Star Wars Clone Trooper Voice Changer Helmet (Hasbro, \$36.99)
3. Leapster Learning Game: Star Wars Jedi Math (LeapFrog, \$24.99)
4. Transformers Animated Voyager Blitzwing (Hasbro, \$58.99)
5. Bakugan Special Attack Delta Dragonoid (Spinmaster, \$18.99)
6. The Dark Knight Stealth Launch Batmobile (Mattel, \$29.99)
7. The Obama Action Figure (Distributoys, \$12.99)
8. LEGO Star Wars Republic Gunship (LEGO, \$119.99)
9. Transforming WALL•E (MPA Sales, \$36.99)
10. Yo Gabba Gabba! Figure Set (Spin Master, \$17.99)

Source: amazon.com 9/8/08



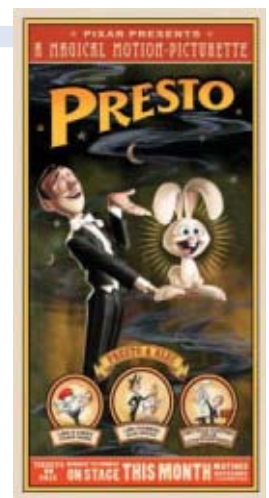
Fraggles Continues to Rock

The folks at Lionsgate and HIT Entertainment have made holiday shopping really simple for fans of Jim Henson and his timeless HBO series *Fraggle Rock*. All 96 episodes of the show, which first began its run in 1983, will be available on **The Fraggle Rock Complete Series Collection: The Ultimate DVD Set** which arrives in stores on November 4. You can expect a lot of Fraggle action in the months ahead. The Weinstein Co. is developing a live-action musical feature based on the gentle puppets, with Cory Edwards (*Hoodwinked*) attached as director and Ahmet Zappa and Brian Inerfeld as exec producers. Oh, and let's not forget that awesome 16-month calendar that can be yours for about \$14. The lyrics to the show's catchy theme song—"Dance your cares away: Worry's for another day"—are still playing in our heads.



Must-Have Item of the Month

Rabbits and magicians have had a long, troubling history together for more than a hundred years. But nothing has quite captured their twisted relationship as well as **Presto**, Doug Sweetland's hilarious short, which played with *WALL•E* in theaters all summer long. We were tickled pink to discover that Acme Archives (www.acmearchivesdirect.com) is offering a limited collector's 19 x 13" giclee on paper of the short's poster, which echoes turn-of-the-century promo art traditions. This piece of toon history will set you back about \$140, but come on, this is a great way to have a souvenir of the summer of 2008 invigorating your work space. ■



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Wagging the Dogs, the Rat and the Iguana

When you create the digital effects for a movie featuring talking dogs, a rat and an iguana, you need to do a lot more than muzzle replacement. Just ask the team at Tippet. *by Barbara Robertson*

When director Chris Noonan's beloved feature *Babe* was released 13 years ago, the effects were so unique the film won a visual effects Oscar. Before *Babe*, the notion of realistic talking animals seemed as possible as, well, lipstick on a pig. Since then, animators and effects artists have created barnyards filled with talking animals for feature films, including, most recently, the visual effects Oscar-winning *The Golden Compass*. Thus, it was only a matter of time before the technique would go to the dogs, and not just one *Underdog*, but a whole yapping pack of *Beverly Hills Chihuahuas*.

Drew Barrymore provides the voice for Chloe, the bejeweled Chihuahua star of the new Disney family comedy. George Lopez is Papi, a studly Chihuahua pup who sounds the alarm when ritzy little Chloe disappears while on vacation with the dog sitter in Mexico. Directed by Raja Gosnell, who previ-

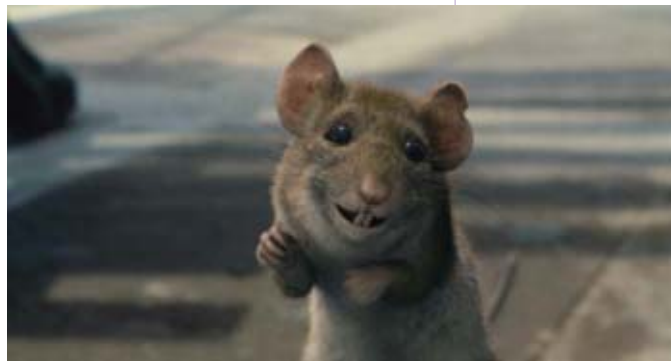
ously directed the two *Scooby-Doo*

feature outings, the film also stars Andy Garcia as Delgado, a streetwise German Shepherd, Cheech Marin as a rat named Manuel and Paul Rodriguez as Chico, an iguana. Jamie Lee Curtis

Put a Muzzle on 'em

The dogs in the film are nearly always real, but with facial features replaced digitally to synch with the dialogue. The rat and iguana, who play the con artists, are always digital. Four visual effects

studios worked on the film: Cinesite in London did muzzle replacements for the dialogue shots with the real dogs; Tippet Studio created the rat, the iguana, all the digital stunt dogs and the digital crowds; Svengali created



"[VFX supervisor] Mike [McAlister] wanted Manuel, the rat, to be more Templeton than Stuart Little, but when he got too real, he started to look creepy."

—James W. Brown, animation supervisor at Tippet Studio

ously directed the two *Scooby-Doo* feature outings, the film also stars Andy Garcia as Delgado, a streetwise German Shepherd, Cheech Marin as a rat named Manuel and Paul Rodriguez as Chico, an iguana. Jamie Lee Curtis

matte paintings and environments; and CIS composited shots. Counting all the muzzle replacements, the film has more than 1,000 visual effects shots.

"Fortunately, the technology is pretty much established in terms of muzzle re-

placements," McAlister says. "So, it was really fun to create the characters for the dogs in this movie and this story as contrasted with all the other talking animal movies."

Because the dogs are telling a story that humans could have acted, McAlister concentrated on having the Cinemasite artists and animators make the lip synch for the dogs with dialogue believable. "We went for more literal lip synch than the other talking animal movies had done," he says. "It was important to be as realistic as possible to keep the human essence of the story intact. If we were drawn to the mouth, we were doing it wrong."

However, for the rat and iguana—who were always digital and never had to stand up next to real examples of their species—the artists at Tippett Studio could take more liberties. "Mike [McAlister] wanted Manuel, the rat, to be more Templeton than Stuart Little," says James W. Brown, animation supervisor at Tippett, referring to the rat in *Charlotte's Web* and the mouse in *Stuart Little*. "But, when he got too real, he started to look creepy."

So, rather than change the model, which the modelers based on a real rat, animators moved him in cuter ways. "You believe he's a rat," says McAlister. "But, he's a very adorable rat."

For reference, Brown and his crew of 16 animators watched wood rats in a local wildlife rescue facility. "They're different from country rats and pack rats," Brown says. "They're kind of like Ratso in *Midnight Cowboy*. Always twitching and itching."

Then, to add cuteness, animators working in Maya tilted Manuel's head to make his eyes look bigger, brought his ears forward to give him a rounder shape, kept his elbows close to his body, and used the animation rig to make his mouth bigger. "We didn't want to change the model, so we did what we could with poses and attitude," says Brown. "Our rigs are set up so we can change the shapes." In

general, when Manuel was in con man mode, he walked on two legs and gestured with his hands; otherwise, he was on all fours.

Three iguanas brought into the studio served as reference for Chico, Tippett's second digital character. "The main thing we saw was that they move only when they need to," Brown says. "And, when they stop, they just stop." When the animators moved the corners of Chico's mouth too much, the reptile's scales slid, which made his face look rubbery. As a result, the animators treated his lip synch more like that of a puppet, and concentrated on his eyes for expression.

"Chico and Manuel are like an old

and Rodriguez performing the dialogue. "Raja [Gosnell, *Chihuahua*'s director] didn't just film the dialogue," Brown says. "He let the camera roll so we could see them in acting mode and thought process mode. It was awesome to sit there and diagnose Cheech Marin and Paul Rodriguez."

The animators also filmed themselves. In one shot, Manuel wears a dog collar like a bandolier, so Tippett's stage crew built a prop from rope and cardboard that an animator wore to pantomime the shot. "He moved completely differently when he was carrying this huge burden," Brown says.

By now, audiences have seen enough talking animals in films to be



Funny Critters: Tippett Studio is responsible for the smooth comedic interactions between Chico, the iguana and Manuel, the rat!

married couple," Brown says. "They are best buddies and intimate with each other. We've done a lot of fighting characters, but those characters don't interact as closely. Chico and Manuel sit on each other, bump each other, back into each other."

In one comedic shot, for example, the two con artists push each other as they back away from an accuser while defending themselves. "It's a comedic moment when Chico [the iguana] tries to hide behind Manuel [the rat]," Brown says. "It's difficult to get that believable interaction in CG."

High on Cheech and Chong

In addition to referencing real animals, the animators watched Cheech and Chong movies and films with Paul Rodriguez as well as video of Marin

willing to suspend their disbelief, but McAlister believes this film raises the bar a little higher. "I'm quite proud of our animation and compositing teams," he says. "I like to think we pushed the reality of the performances a bit; there are a lot of scenes in which you'd have to prove to me that animals don't talk."

But, he goes on to say that reality is not his most important measure. Emotionality is, and characters don't have to be real to generate strong feelings in an audience. "*Sleeping Beauty* and other animated movies are emotionally rich," he says. "We'll see if other people think our characters have more emotionality, but I think the stuff works." ■

Disney's Beverly Hills Chihuahua starts yapping in U.S. theaters on October 3.



It Takes an Electric Village!

Director Gil Kenan and vfx supervisor Eric Durst join forces with vfx houses BUF and Luma to bring *City of Ember* to life. **by Ron Magid**

After leaving his creative mark on the performance-capture animated hit *Monster House* a couple of years ago, director Gil Kenan decided to swim in live-action waters for his sophomore effort. Based on the popular fantasy novels by Jeanne DuPrau, Kenan's adaptation of *City of Ember* centers on the residents of a magical city/village of glittering lights powered by

huge water wheels. When the city's once-powerful generator begins to fail, the great lamps that illuminate the city start to flicker.

Even though the production built the tallest soundstage in Europe—inside a former shipyard in Belfast where the doomed *Titanic* ocean liner was constructed—the space couldn't do justice to the scope of Kenan's vision. Impressed by the unusual character and environmental work in

"I went to CalArts and did traditional and computer animation for years," Durst says. "Gil has an animator's way of thinking that I instantly related to. Some people do animatics just to place the cameras, but Gil used them to understand weight and timing; I loved that, because that's how I think as well. Our shared animation background resulted in a wonderful collaboration that's pretty rare on a live-action set."



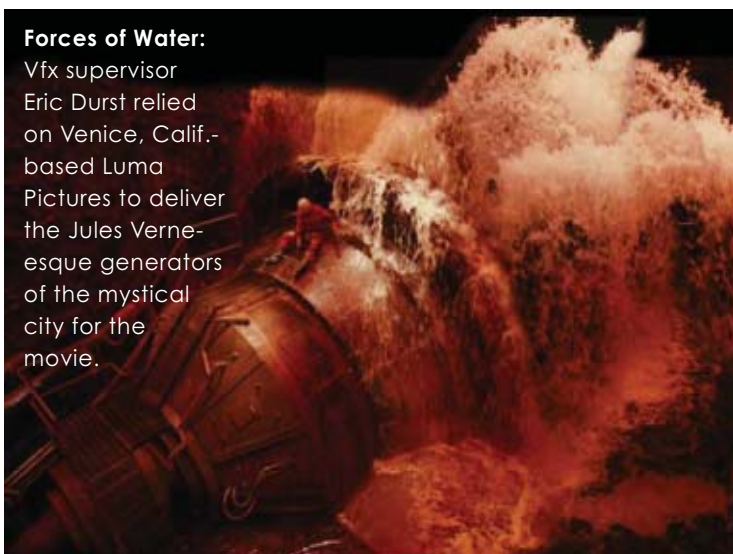
Gil Kenan

The vaguely European style *Ember* and the steampunk environment beneath that powers the city echo *Metropolis'* contrast between the workers and the masters and demanded a postmodern blend of large sets and digital effects to bring both environs to life. Durst "cast" two separate facilities, which brought their distinct sensibilities to the diverse sets: BUF tackled *Ember*, while Luma Pictures brought the generators to life: "We chose the two companies because there's a different feel to their work. BUF is very European and brought that feel to *Ember*, while Luma did the high-tech, Jules Verne-esque stuff."

Production designer Martin Laing visualized *Ember* as a small village, replete with narrow alleyways that twist and turn, hinting at much more than you see. "We utilized several interior-exterior sets like the courtyard, where the main action takes place, then BUF built city extensions and added the lighting grid for the wide shots—like in the title sequence, where

Forces of Water:

Vfx supervisor Eric Durst relied on Venice, Calif.-based Luma Pictures to deliver the Jules Verne-esque generators of the mystical city for the movie.



The Last Mimzy, Kenan enlisted vfx artist and fellow animator, Eric Durst (*Batman Forever*, *Spider-Man 2*), to create *Ember* and a couple of demanding digital characters—to the tune of some 400 shots. The two artists' wavelengths were immediately in sync.

continued on page 82

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Points of Light:
Under Gil Kenan's direction, the illuminated city envisioned by author Jeanne DuPrau comes to cinematic life.

City of Ember

continued from page 80

we start very tight on a light bulb, then pull back to see the entire city with people walking around. BUF created that big opening shot, and it's all synthetic."

But it's the under-world generator that feels the most futuristic in a retro, Industrial Revolution kind of way. This otherworldly creation features twin turbines at either end of a turquoise river, with massive metallic Art Deco structures housing the generator. "We had a set with part of the

everything was synthetic."

Like the haunted house of his first movie, Kenan wanted the generator to feel like a living character. "It's the heart of the city and it's pumping like a heart," Durst explains. "There's a spectacular shot where you see all these pumps and gears and you get the sense that you're inside an organism. Luma's animation surges and vibrates like it's a heart pumping. It's very beautiful."

Durst also "cast" the creature animation, giving an oversized moth to BUF and a star-nosed

liantly portrayed that in the animation."

While in Ireland, Kenan contacted a star-nosed mole expert, a biologist at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Durst and Luma's artists studied the weird little creatures via reference video on YouTube. The biggest challenge was making the mole appear to sense things via the little tentacles around its nose. "There's a scene where Lina is hiding and the tentacles just touch her hand," Durst says. "In that shot, we really understand that he's like a blind person touching the wall to 'see' where things are."

Unlike the mole, the giant moth that BUF created was not threatening, but gentle. BUF's challenge was imbuing the insect with a puppy-like quality. "This wasn't some creepy bug that was going to hurt the hero—it was very submissive like a dog that hurt its paw," Durst says. "BUF brilliantly animated that creature through its eyes and the cocking of its head, which gave it lots of personality. They did a wonderful job, very subtle work."

The same can be said for Durst's entire approach to effects for *The City of Ember*, where subtle extensions and understated performances brought the environs and its unique characters to cinematic life. ■

Universal releases Fox/Walden's *City of Ember* on October 10 in U.S. theaters.

"Some people do animatics just to place the cameras, but [director] Gil [Kenan] used them to understand weight and timing."

—Eric Hurst, vfx supervisor, *City of Ember*

generator exterior and the bridge spanning the river, but that was pretty much it; Luma created everything else," Durst says. "Behind the bridge and the buildings on the left and right was a 50-foot-high green-screen and down below was a big rectangular pool we were originally going to fill with water just to have some interactive lighting, but ultimately we decided to just put a green-screen down there. Luma did the extensions on the generator buildings, the waterwheel turbines and extensive digital water effects—

mole (a furry creature with tentacles surrounding its nose) to Luma. Although a real star-nosed mole measures a couple inches, this one had to be eight feet long. "Without trying it looks sinister because it's pretty weird," says Durst, stressing that Kenan's goal was to give the monstrous creature believable motivation as it attacks Ember's protagonists, Lina and Doon. "He comes after them, not because he's mean, but because he's starving. He's threatening as any wild animal, but it's not personal, and Luma bril-

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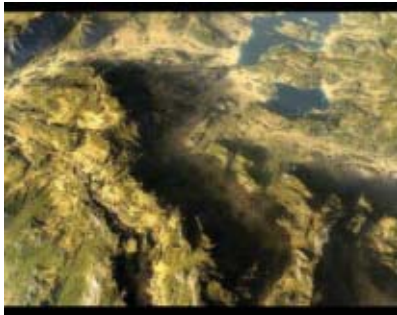
by Todd Sheridan Perry



World Machine v.2

Building environments to take audiences to different worlds is not a new art. It's been around for centuries or longer. As long as stories have been told about far away places, there has been a need for artists to create those far away places. Backdrops turned into full sets, which turned into sound stages and then matte paintings, then miniatures. CG environments were some of the first things to be played with digitally, oftentimes starting off as full matte paintings on glass, and then digitized into the computer world. Over the past couple of decades, software has risen to the task to create full 3D CG terrains.

World Machine 2 was developed by Stephen Schmitt's big mathematically gifted brain up in Seattle, Wash. to accommo-



credit: Eoin Armstrong

date terrain building. This is the latest version of the release after the initial World Machine came out in 2005.

The unique thing about WM that takes it beyond some of its competitors is the completely procedural methodology for building the terrains. It really feels like Houdini in its approach as it's made up of nodes (called devices in WM2). So, the creation node sets everything up, and then nodes are added into the flow to modify the terrain. Each node can be changed after the fact to tweak and adjust the creation of the world.

WM2 provides tools for customizing, cutting and adjusting the terrain within the flow. In addition, it offers powerful texturing tools to control the look based on the context of the terrain. I like the working style of the program, but I'm used to Houdini, Mas-

sive and node-based compositing and particle/dynamics software. It may have a steeper learning curve than its competitors, but it's this open, complex approach that makes the program powerful.

It comes in three flavors: Basic, Standard and Professional. The basic is fine for getting used to it and toying around, as some of its export abilities are curtailed. The standard gives one all the tools necessary for creating spectacular environments. But it's really the professional edition that is ready for primetime, opening up everything to 64-bit, multi-threaded processing, managing large data sets, ability to tile environments to save on building one super-huge world and scripting capabilities (a must to work with any large pipelines).

Website: www.world-machine.com

Price: \$89 (Standard); \$189 (Professional Per-Seat License); \$1,000 (Professional Site License)

Imagineer Systems' monet v2.1.1

Roto and tracking can be dangerous business with pitfalls at every turn. Any software that makes this journey more pleasant is a welcome addition to any toolset. Imagineer Systems' monet is just such a tool. There are so many features in this robust software that I'm going to forgo my usual rants and rattle off a breakdown.

However, let me preface it by saying that this tool saved our butts in a recent job I was on that was shooting on film, with a wide lens (and they pushed the exposure on the film, making it even grainier and harder to track). The lens was long enough to not readily detect distortion, but wide enough to really mess up the track. In fact, we had to stabilize around one element of the shot to see that the image was bending like a bad acid trip. Monet's magic saved the day.

With that said (deep breath), here is the laundry list: Planar tracker which combines 2D and 3D trackers to find a plane in space; robust toolset to adjust the track; perspective tracking (stemming from the 2D/3D hybrid); roto-scoping compounded with the track marks and tracked planes to reduce the time for roto and the manual labor. You can also track rotating objects. There are extraction tools to replace shadows and highlights on reflective surfaces where your element is being tracked into—even with textured backgrounds. You also get lens distortion analysis tools which let you remove distortion to get better tracks or recreate distortion in elements. Oh yes, and they also throw in automated tracker removal.

If that's not enough for you to take a look at monet, I just don't know what to say. It does have siblings that specialize in particular areas, like roto (motor), keying (mokey)



credit: ACHT Frankfurt

and 2D tracking (mocha), but monet seem to wrap it all up in a tidy little bundle.

Website: www.imagineersystems.com

Price: \$6,500 (floating license); \$5,000 (node-locked license) [dollar price converted from British pound]

Mir Vadim's RayFire

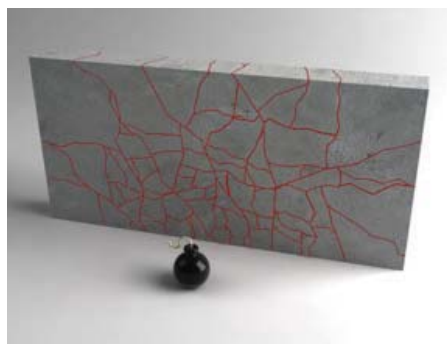
Have you every tried to pre-fracture a 3D object to prepare it for any kind of dynamics? If you haven't heard of this process, it's a method of breaking up a 3D object into a bunch of smaller ones so that the program can calculate collisions and forces during a dynamics simulation. I can tell you right now that in the best of worlds, it's time consuming and tedious, and will bring about the sudden urge to kick ducklings. Houdini was the best at automating the process, but before the latest iteration of Houdini, it took a theoretical science major to put together the recursive SOP, WOP, COP, and HOP on POPS to get it to work.

To solve this problem, a small company—and by company I mean one man named Mir Vadim—has created a plug-in for 3ds

Max to do just that called RayFire. In its base form, RayFire allows you to choose an object (or multiple objects) and procedurally score it in a way that it's prepped for a dynamics engine to take over the animation. That is in itself a timesaver that can make or break a shot, or even a whole production.

What is mind-boggling about this product is the different methods with which you can fracture the target objects. You can manually sketch where you want the fracture lines, determine impact points by mouse clicks and fracture based on the pivot point of the object so the fractures are more dense nearest the rotation/oscillation point. You can choose regular or irregular fracturing or set it up so that the fractures are more dense nearest a Bomb space warp (that way the area nearest the bomb breaks into smaller pieces, while further away are larger chunks).

A lot of thought (and/or experience) has



gone into this little gem of a plugin. Furthermore, it works with third-party dynamics engines, specifically Nvidia's PhysX engine. Thinking Particles likes RayFire ... And, I don't see any reason why a

Maya-based production couldn't fbx models over to Max for pre-scoring, and then back into Maya. Take it from me, someone who has spent centuries of my life pre-fracturing models. This product is something that should be in any studio's arsenal—and it's \$255 for crying out loud. So, push off buying the tickets to Wicked, and save yourself millions of dollars and a couple of ulcers.

Website: www.mirvadim.com

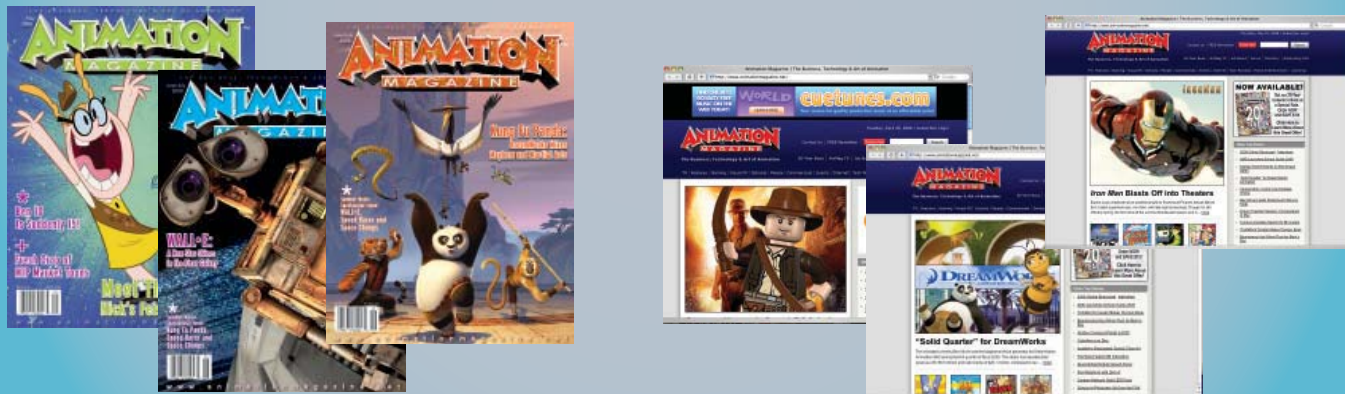
Price: \$255 ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and vfx supervisor of Max Ink Productions. He can be reached at ducky@maxinkcafe.com.

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*Barenbraut* by Derek Roczen

by adding, "Yes, together with [Arles, France's] Supinfocom." His school makes a concerted effort to advise students about competitions, and to help them submit their films. In both 2006 and 2007, SIGGRAPH's Jury Prize went to Filmakademie students.

Of course, the school's admittance process focuses on se-

lecting applicants who are primed to succeed. Typically 100 people apply to the six-year-old Institute's program each year. Haegele says, "We take 10 to 15 students. They need one year of working experience to apply. We expect them to know Maya, 3ds Max, Softimage or Houdini, for example, because we do not teach software. Some people have already studied at other schools—maybe for three or four years."

Testing the Talent

After submitting sample films, applicants may then be invited to take an entrance exam. Those who pass must then make a short film, and they're given three days to do it. "You wouldn't

The German Pursuit of Perfection

How Baden-Württemberg's Filmakademie has become phenomenally successful in honing the talents of its animation students in six short years.

by Ellen Wolff

To get a feel for the global nature of modern animation, one need only to walk through the "Village" at this summer's SIGGRAPH conference in L.A. In that small space on the exhibition floor, the multitude of languages being spoken provided a telling measure of internationalism. Among the attendees was Professor Thomas Haegele, who directs the Institute of Animation, Visual Effects and Digital Post-production at Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg in Ludwigsburg, Germany. In his impeccable English, Haegele enthusiastically shared his optimism about Filmakademie animations making an impact at SIGGRAPH.

"We had a film nominated for Best Student Film this year," says Haegele, referring to *Barenbraut* by Filmakademie's Derek Roczen. The black and white "wood-cut" style of Roczen's animation stood out—not only from

other SIGGRAPH entries, but from the five other Filmakademie pieces selected by the festival this year. "I'm happy that we have a broad bandwidth. We took part in DreamWorks' Educators Symposium at SIGGRAPH, where schools were invited to submit tapes

"It seemed that many schools specialize in a style. But our tape had CG animation, puppet animation, hand-drawn animation and visual effects. It's such a broad range."

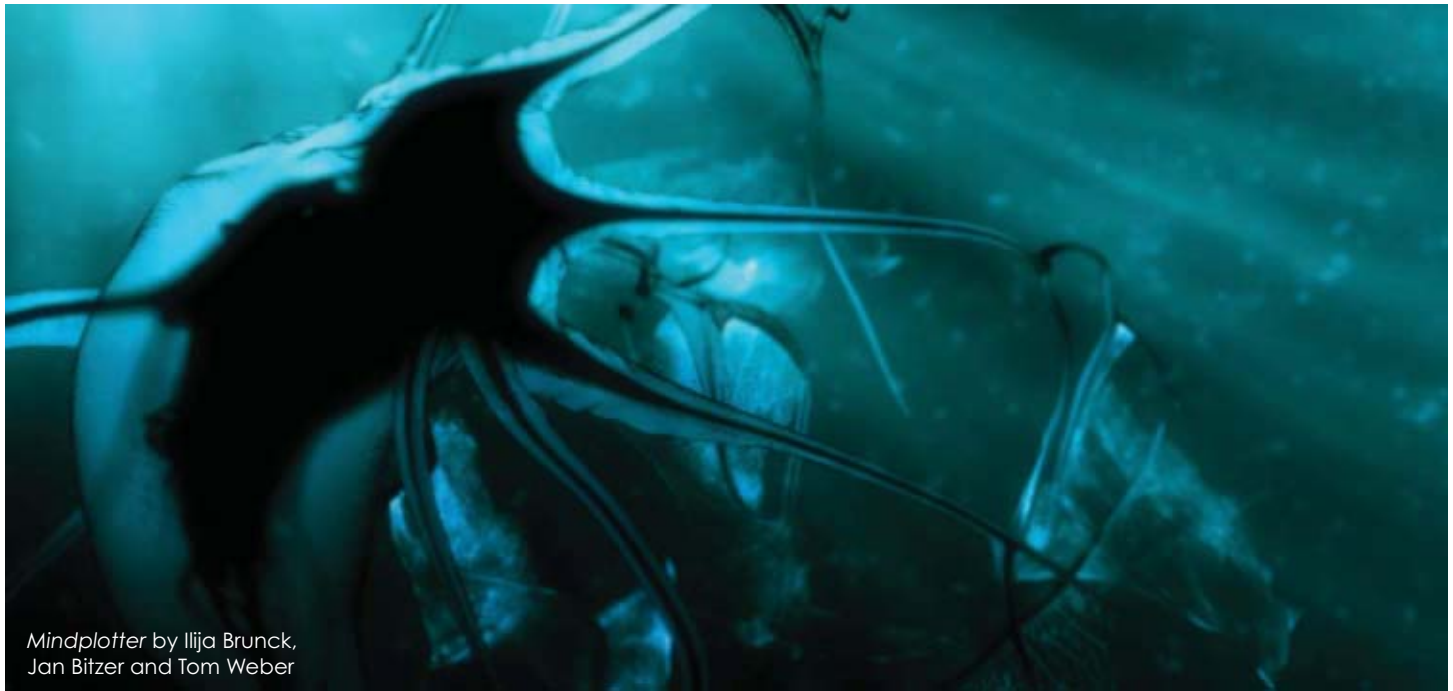
—Professor Thomas Haegele, director of the Institute of Animation, Visual Effects and Digital Post-production at Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg.

showing what they're doing. It seemed that many schools specialize in a style. But our tape had CG animation, puppet animation, hand-drawn animation and visual effects. It's such a broad range."

Filmakademie students are attracting significant attention on the festival scene, which Haegele acknowledges

believe what they can do," says Haegele. He adds with a smile that it's after they're enrolled that their ambitions grow and they need more time!

Students in the Institute's program follow the broader Filmakademie curriculum during their first year, which includes three-month courses in directing actors, camerawork, scriptwriting



Mindplotter by Ilija Brunck,
Jan Bitzer and Tom Weber

and experimental filmmaking. "It is useful," observes Haegele, "so that when they light a computer scene, they will know the basics."

"In the second year they study animation basics within the Institute, and they can also take courses like directing or scriptwriting. Then in the third year, they really join the Institute, and have a room with a workstation and all the software packages available on the network. But they can also use other techniques, including puppet animation or even sand animation if they want." (Haegele notes that Filmakademie alumnus Chris Stenner earned a 2002 Oscar nomination for Best Animated Short for the stop-motion film *Das Rad (Rocks)*. Stenner then went on to animate on Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*.)

In the summer following their third year, Filmakademie students begin their diploma films, working solo or as a team. Haegele says, "That's not really regulated. We encourage them to pitch their ideas to other students, so we have big teams with most films. A

student may do the compositing on another student's visual effects film, for example. He does not have to make his own film to get a diploma."

What really distinguishes Filmakademie, however, is its "team teaching" approach, which utilizes scores of guest lecturers each year. "We bring in people from the industry for a week—or even a day—to talk about specific themes, look at student projects and give advice," says Haegele. He notes that these lecturers have come from studios like Pixar, Digital Domain, ILM, DreamWorks, Sony and Framestore. "We're lucky that we can afford to invite guest teachers even for a group of three or four students." Such diversity of lecturers enables the Institute to keep

students current with new developments like digital cinema and stereoscopic 3-D.

The benefits of these relationships accrue to Filmakademie in several ways. This year, the Institute became the first overseas school selected for Sony's IPAX program. And students looking for internships and jobs have been helped as well. Haegele remarks, "We have graduates working at these studios, so when students from Filmakademie submit their reels, the studios are interested. We had one intern go to Digital Domain, and the experience was so successful for him he didn't come back!" ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects,

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It's Who You Know

One Plus Hub highlights the importance of networking.

by Jill Gilbert

As the old cliché goes: It's not what you know, it's who you know—especially in Hollywood. In an industry where job-hopping is the norm, the must-have tools are a BlackBerry full of contacts, a LinkedIn profile and a packed lunch schedule. In the animation community, however, this hasn't historically been the case, as most animation people worked at a single studio for their entire career.

That's all over now. With emerging delivery platforms, new technologies and the use of animation in many forms of media, it is critical to know what is going on in the studio, the editing suite and the marketplace. And the best way to find out this information is by meeting people who can share it.

As an executive at DisneyToon Studios, I was keenly aware that this networking need was not being met in the animation community. When I tried to create it, the idea was met with resistance and skepticism from my immediate superior. I was even told to consult with the HR department on this issue. Once I left the company, however, I decided to press forward on my own.

In the fall of 2005, I organized a dinner for eight colleagues from the animation divisions of each of the major studios. It was fun but, in all honesty, rather limited. Networking with people you already know doesn't leave you with the same sense of excitement as meeting new people who are doing innovative things. Plus, sitting at dinner hindered our ability to mingle freely. While the intention was right, I needed a different approach.

Two months later, I enticed 25 people to Sonora Café for drinks. In a more casual setting, the group was free to circulate and connect, creating an ideal situation for new relationships to form. Some people I knew, while others came from studios that I didn't even know existed. The event opened my eyes to the animation community that stretched far beyond the large Hollywood

studios. The night was a success, and the One Plus Hub was born.

In the past two-and-a-half years, the One Plus Hub has grown to over 500 members. Every three months, animation producers, directors, writers, executives, agents, composers and managers in all media (films,



Mingling with Toon Types:

One Plus Hub events offer the opportunity for animation industry professionals to network and form new partnerships. Aaron Simpson, founder of Cold Hard Flash, and teams from Six Point Harness, Renegade, Animax, Worldwide Biggies, Curious Pictures, Augenblick Studios and Animation Collective will be attending the Oct. 16 event at M1-5 Lounge in New York City, beginning at 7 p.m.



television series, web and mobile entertainment) network and discuss today's issues and the future of animation locally and globally. After one of my get togethers, an animation writer/director said to me, "It's easy to lose track of people in this business because everyone moves around so much. What I love about your events is that I get to reconnect with friends and artists I haven't seen in ages." In order to keep the gatherings exciting, I invite special guests or focus the event on a specific theme; for example, REAL D, one of the leaders in stereoscopic cinema, hosted a demonstration with stereoscopic 3-D animation directors Phil McNally (DreamWorks), Robert Neuman (Disney) and Rob Engle (Sony). In April, a record 175 people packed the Formosa Café as we highlighted Flash animation with special

guests Aaron Simpson, founder of coldhardflash.com, and the studio heads of Six Point Harness, Titmouse, Renegade, OddBot and Animax. And just this past September, Lisa Kaye, founder and CEO of greenlightjobs.com, attended to discuss online recruitment for creative and technical talent within the entertainment industry.

The One Plus Hub's next event will be in January 2009. Our first New York event took place October 16 and again focused on Flash animation; Aaron Simpson and I brought together three studios from Los Angeles and five studios from the New York community to make it a truly exciting occasion. MTV is interested in participating in one of my future events to coincide with the launch of their new online animation site. This past May, I traveled to Taiwan to connect with the exploding animation community there, paving the way for an event in Taipei. This would be a cultural "first" for Taiwan's growing animation industry. It's critical that we educate ourselves about the business, reconnect with former colleagues, make new friends, and create a sense of unity in this growing industry. The One Plus Hub events are fun and easy, which is a nice break after slaving all day to keep our artistic integrity stimulated and our business thriving.

I am extremely grateful for the One Plus Hub, and I'm looking forward to watching it continue to grow in ways that I have yet to discover. While the One Plus Hub's future is uncertain, there is one thing I know: I'm now connected to lots of friends and colleagues in the animation community who will help me figure it out. ■

Jill Gilbert is the founder and president of the animation production company, One Plus Productions. She recently produced a series of shorts called *The Misadventures of Bob Paparazzo* for VH1 Online and Mobile. Prior to founding One Plus Productions, Jill served as VP of creative affairs at Disney Toon Studios.



Jill Gilbert

For news, info and event dates, visit www.oneplusproductions.com.

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APE Alternative Press Expo	Nov. 1 to 2	San Francisco, CA	www.comic-con.org/ape
Animacor Int'l Animation Festival	Nov. 3 to 8	Córdoba, Spain	www.animacor.com
Interfilm Berlin	Nov. 4 to 9	Berlin, Germany	www.interfilm.de
Holland Animation Festival	Nov. 5 to 9	Utrecht, Netherlands	www.haff.nl
American Film Market	Nov. 5 to 12	Santa Monica, CA	www.americanfilmmarket.com
NekoCon	Nov. 7 to 9	Hampton, VA	www.nekocon.com
Wizard World Texas	Nov. 7 to 9	Arlington, TX	www.wizardworld.com
Bradford Animation Festival	Nov. 12 to 15	Bradford, U.K.	www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/baf
AURORA	Nov. 12 to 16	Norwich, U.K.	www.aurora.org.uk
Bel Air Film Festival	Nov. 13 to 18	Bel Air, CA	www.belairfilmfestival.com
2D or Not 2D Animation Festival	Nov. 14 to 15	Seattle, WA	www.plexipixel.com/2dornot2d
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